JOE BONAMASSA BLUES-ROCKER ON THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

DICK DENNEY
The genius behind the Vox AC30's timeless chime

The Guitar Magazine

OCTOBER 2018 VOL 30 NO 1

SUPERIOR VINTAGE

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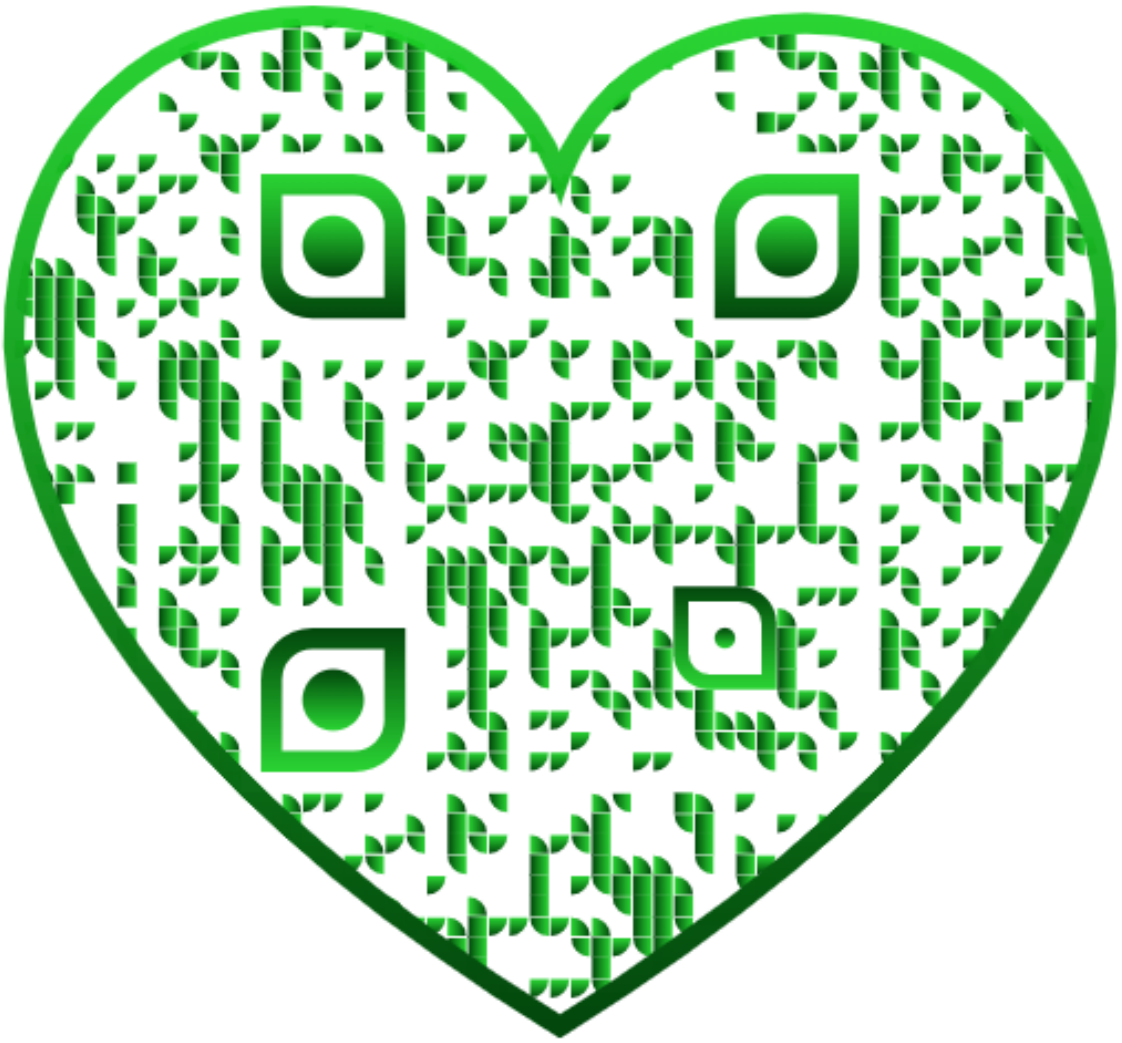

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In with the old...

Regular readers of this magazine will be used to getting close enough to legendary instruments to see the paint peeling and the patina of age, but this month, we're really spoiling you with a smorgasbord of vintage gear. Aside from the extremely cool '63 Gibson SG/Les Paul Standard that's gracing our cover, we're also checking out a southern-fried electric guitar collection to die for in Mississippi, reveal the top 10 must-have vintage stompboxes with the help of Reverb.com and play the Maton Mastersound George Harrison used onstage with The Beatles.

For a lifelong Beatles fan such as myself it was a serious buzz to get my hands on that instrument and yes, those are George's Ray-Bans I'm wearing in the picture, and you'll be hearing no apologies! Turn to p8 to see more of the guitar (and the sunglasses) and head to youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to hear the MS500 plugged into – you guessed it – a 1963 AC30. While we're the subject of Vox, this month we're also celebrating the life and times of the man who gave Vox amps their chime, Dick Denney.

If new gear's more your thing, then head to the review section of the mag to read about hot new guitars, amps and effects from the likes of Blackstar, Friedman, Taylor and Stone Deaf – and don't forget to enter our competition to win a marvellous Marshall DSL20 combo. As if all that wasn't enough, we recently caught up with Joe Bonamassa to get the skinny on his latest studio album – read all about it on p46. Phew! Shall we do this all again next month?

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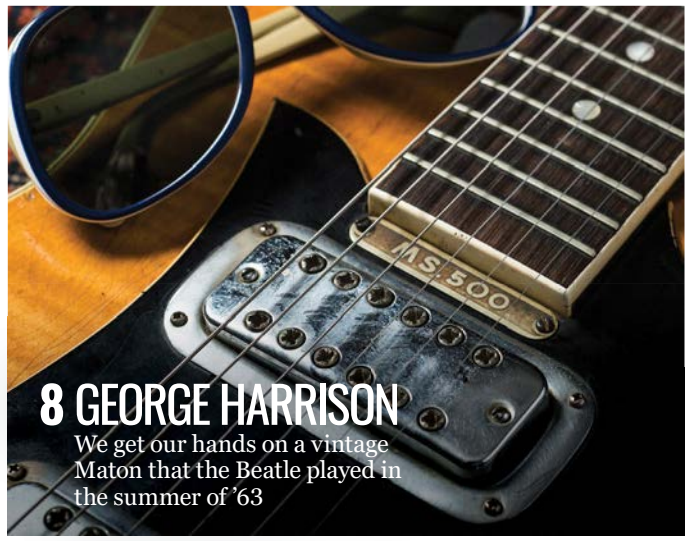

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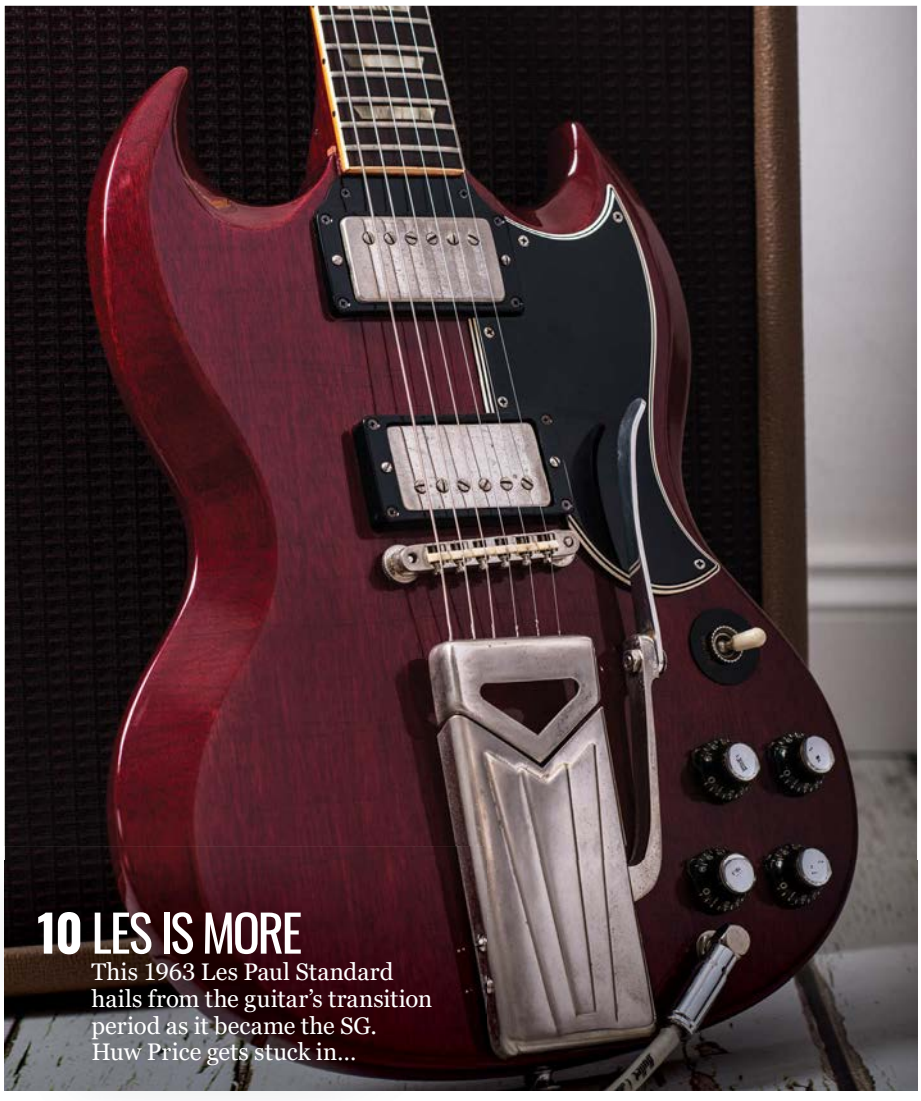
We get our hands on a vintage Maton that the Beatle played in the summer of '63



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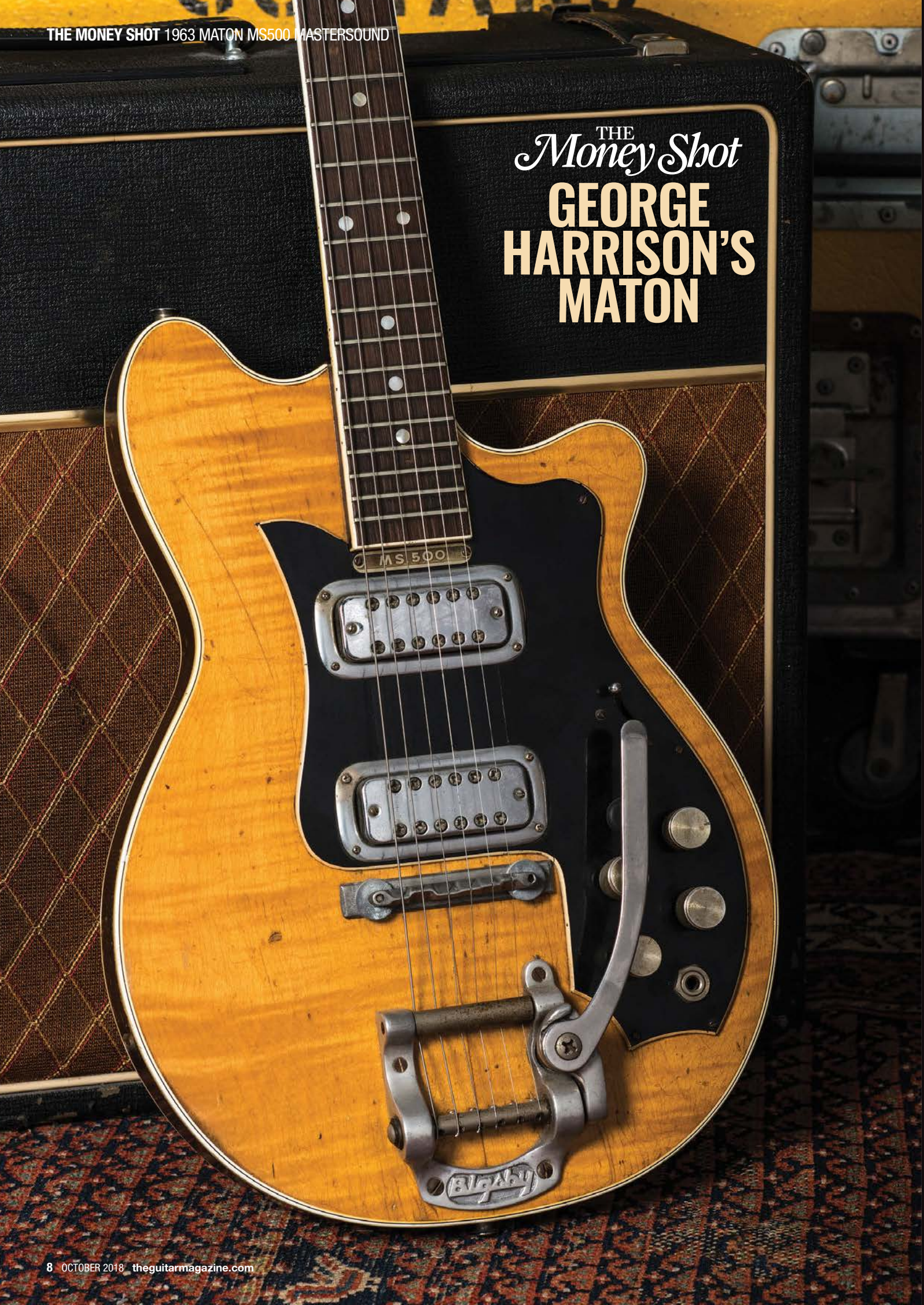

THE *Money Shot*

GEORGE HARRISON'S MATON

Beatle guitars have been no strangers to auction houses in recent years, but this might be one of the most interesting and unique of them all. Back in the summer of '63 when the band were basking in the recent success of number one single *From Me To You* – and about to blow their career into the stratosphere with the record-breaking *She Loves You* – George's Gretsch Country Gentleman went in for repair on 3 July at Barratts music store in Manchester.

Though both of its faulty tuners were replaced on the same day, the guitar that road manager Neil Aspinall was given as a backup for George – an Australian-made Maton MS500 Mastersound – ended up being hung onto by the Beatle until mid-August. Photographic evidence proves that George used the Maton live at several shows during that period, which may even have included the group's final performance at their home from home, Liverpool's Cavern Club.

Last time the guitar went under the hammer in 2015, bidding closed at a whopping $485,000 and it's set to feature at auction again as part of Gardiner Houlgate's next guitar and music memorabilia sale on the 12 and 13 September 2018. Head to youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to see our video and guitar-auctions.co.uk for more information.

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HORNS OF PLENTY

The Les Paul officially became the SG in 1963, but guitars were still leaving Kalamazoo with the man's name on their truss rod covers until the tail end of the year. Huw Price gets to grips with one of the last examples, along with that sideways Vibrola…

You never really know what you're going to get with vintage Gibsons. The hollowbodies and semis are frequently pristine, possibly because the players that owned them were often jazzers who tend to be quite careful with their gear and more restrained in performance. In contrast, Juniors and Specials are rock 'n' roll workhorses and so often the survivors bear the scars to prove it.

Old SGs can be much the same, but even those that have been cherished have often fallen foul of the design's structural weak spots. We can only wonder where this guitar has spent the last 55 years, but if pushed, we'd suggest that much of the time, it was inside its original case.

The colour is a vibrant dark cherry and although there is all-over lacquer checking, there are only three areas where the finish shows any sign of wear. There's a sizeable dent/chip on the back near the control cavity, some chipping and flaking around the neck join and a bit of rash on the back of the neck where the finish has reacted to the fabric inside the case.

One thing the chips reveal is that Gibson was spraying its finishes quite thick during this era. Happily, there is no neck wear or buckle rash and the headstock has never even been damaged, let alone repaired.

The logo and crown inlays have a golden glow under yellowed lacquer on the wide headstock, but the rosewood fingerboard appears virtually unworn and there's ample life left in the factory fitted low-profile jumbo frets. Even the fret nibs survive largely intact.

It's interesting to note how aggressively Gibson bevelled the 'board edges, and it appears to have been done post-spraying. It introduces a comfortable roll over and would have been invisible when new, but as the clear lacquer has yellowed, the bevel shows up as a sharp line.

This image **The hinged vibrato arm folds all the way back so if you don't want to use it, fold and forget it**

Above right **This guitar's early Patent Number humbuckers are almost identical to PAFs and sound much the same**

Also curious is the way the binding is proud of the neck in some areas on the treble side. It's perfect on the bass side, but on the other it's almost as if they forgot to scrape the binding flush at the factory. There is also evidence of shrinkage, with a sizeable gap at the nut and fret nibs that no longer line up with the frets. But hey, if this sort of thing bothers you, then perhaps a reissue would be more a more suitable option.

There are no concerns in the control cavity because everything appears just as it did when it left the factory. This guitar predates brass cavity linings and if you look closely you can see that a shaving was chiselled out to get the pickup switch to fit. Both tone capacitors are ceramic types and they're wired to the inputs rather than the outputs of the volume pots. Both pickups are the original Patent Number humbuckers.

Unusually for a 1963 model, this example is equipped with Gibson's notorious sideways vibrato. Most 1963 SGs that sport factory-fitted vibratos have the Maestro unit with the Lyre faceplate. The unit here is a sizeable piece of hardware to fix onto a guitar, but it possibly helps to balance it out because there's no tendency to nose dive and the guitar still feels light.

IN USE

There are few things we love more than a 1950s Gibson neck, and had Gibson necks not gone super skinny in '61, it's possible that there would be even more enthusiasm for first and second year SGs. Fortunately Gibson was rediscovering its spokeshave mojo by 1963, and although this example feels different to a 1950s neck, it has good depth and it's extremely comfortable.

With a squarer-sided C profile, it actually feels more hand filling than some of Gibson's older and deeper

KEY FEATURES

1963 Gibson SG/Les Paul Standard

- **PRICE** £11,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with set mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard with trapezoid markers, 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Kluson two-ring tuners, Tune-o-matic bridge with Gibson (sideways) Vibrola
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Patent Number humbuckers, individual volume & tone, 3-way switch
- **FINISH** Cherry nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.9mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.6mm at first fret, 23.0mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.2mm at nut, 51.4mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.16kg/6.97lb
- **CONTACT** ATB Guitars **www.atbguitars.com**

Top left **Gibson's approach to fret bevelling was somewhat enthusiastic and it extends halfway down the fingerboard binding**

Right **The single line Kluson tuners are in great shape and feature period correct double ring keys**

Bottom left **The Les Paul SG headstock is wider than the single-cut Les Paul Standard's and features a crown inlay**

necks. The depth is also more consistent from headstock to heel, which makes sense with a 22nd fret body join.

Despite its less than rosy reputation, the sideways vibrato turns out to be a perfectly usable device – once you get used to the way it works and understand its limitations. Rather than press down or pull up on the arm, as you would a Bigsby or a Strat trem, the Gibson arm moves laterally across the front of the body. It makes sense because as you're playing you can curl your fingers under the arm and squeeze upwards to drop the pitch or push it away to raise it. Alternatively, just waggle the thing for a gentle pitch wobble.

The arm is also hinged, so you can set it almost flat to the pickguard, where it's quite unobtrusive, angle it slightly upwards for easier access or fold it back completely and forget it's even there. The controls are also a lot easier to access than they are when a Bigsby is fitted to an SG. However, while it's perfectly suitable for gentle vibrato, it has nothing like the range of a Strat trem or even a Bigsby and tuning chaos ensues if you become over enthused.

THE ACOUSTIC TONE IS EVERYTHING WE'D EXPECT FROM A MAHOGANY GIBSON OF THIS ERA

The acoustic tone is everything we'd expect from a mahogany Gibson of this era with a Tune-o-matic bridge. There's ample sustain, a smooth and harmonically rich fatness and a treble response that falls a little short of Juniors and so forth with aluminium wrapover tailpieces.

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Above **Space is tight inside the SG's control cavity so Gibson opted for small ceramic tone caps**

Although the Patent Number humbuckers aren't PAFs, they aren't far off and they deliver everything we might expect from their 1950s predecessors. Maybe they're just a little darker sounding, and the bridge in particular has a touch more nasal snarl, but these units are super clear, very articulate and dynamic, and they interact with the controls to deliver a wide range of classic tones.

Given that our experiences with PAFs have been mostly confined to Les Pauls, added to the fact that the differences we are hearing are so minimal, it's entirely possible that they could be attributed to the guitar's nylon saddles and lightweight all-mahogany construction.

Despite making some minor adjustments, we find the neck pickup slightly overshadows the bridge in output and tone. The bridge has a fantastic and unmistakeable vintage Gibson sound, producing a jangly bite when clean and an aggressive bark with overdrive.

THE NECK PICKUP POSSESSES A SMOOTH WOODINESS AND SUPERB DYNAMIC RESPONSE

The neck unit is simply outstanding. It possesses a smooth woodiness, superb dynamic response and a precise attack that never becomes edgy.

From a tonal and playing perspective this is a no-issues vintage SG. The few minor blemishes that it does have are entirely cosmetic and whether you prioritise playability or collectability, this guitar ticks both boxes, enthusiastically.

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PRIVATE COLLECTION

SOUTHERN FRIED

Mississippi native Kris Blakely has one of the most breathtaking guitar collections we've ever encountered, ranging from instruments that saw action in World War II, to Paul Kossoff's 1959 Les Paul Standard. Chris Vinnicombe pays him a visit...

PHOTOGRAPHY ANA BLAKELY DAVIS

If you've ever whiled away the hours gazing at fine guitars on the internet – and if you haven't, it's entirely possible that you are reading the wrong magazine – you may well be familiar with Kris Blakely, especially if your lust for gear has led you to The Les Paul Forum or Instagram, where Blakely goes by the name 'Fried Okra'.

A popular Southern dish made by frying battered okra in a cast-iron skillet until it's crispy, Fried Okra became Kris's nickname over 30 years ago. As a somewhat worse-for-wear 17-year-old at a house party, he caused a small fire while trying to satiate a case of the munchies by throwing a frozen box of breaded okra into a very hot pan... and promptly falling asleep. Happily, there were no injuries, but the nickname stuck.

Like so many Southern families, music went way back in the Blakely house: "It all started with my father, as well as his family," Kris recalls. "They played various stringed instruments, guitars, mandolins, banjos, et cetera. Every year we have a family reunion back in the hills, near the old stomping grounds as the old folks say. Though it's becoming less every year, it's still a lot of bluegrass and gospel music played whenever the old timers get together. It really is something special.

"My dad, a brother of nine, grew up with his father 'Pawpaw' cutting and hauling pulp wood. Pawpaw was known for making moonshine for a meagre living. After spending time in Parchman [Mississippi State Penitentiary] he decided to get out of that business. My father, not wanting to struggle like his father, started a commercial roofing company in 1966 and became quite successful.

"I remember he would come in from work late in the evenings and play some blues shuffles or some Elvis chords, it was a wonderful time. When I was about nine years old in the late 70s, my dad gave me my first guitar for Christmas. It was a small Harmony parlour-style guitar, which I still have to this day. I guess I really did start collecting early!"

We wonder exactly when he felt the collecting bug bite. "It was thanks to my best friend Trip's brother-in-law Mike," Kris replies. "He was an attorney in Memphis and one hell of a guitar slinger. One summer break around 1990, Trip and I went to Memphis to visit his sister. While visiting Trip said, 'Okra, let me show you Mike's killer old Les Paul.' It was a 1959 Sunburst Les Paul, and when Mike plugged it into that old Marshall, well, I was blown away. Not knowing much about vintage guitars, Mike showed me what they sold for in a *Vintage Guitar* magazine. Good lord! I had no idea. So my pursuit of vintage guitar collecting began."

Previous page **Kris with the 1959 Les Paul previously owned by Paul Kossoff, and 'The Bishop', a 1957 Goldtop sent back to Gibson factory in 1959 for a Sunburst finish (features pre-sticker PAFs)**
Above left **1957 Fender Esquire**
Above right **1955 Tele headstock**
Right **1957 Esquire headstock**
Above **1954 Esquire, '52 Telecaster, '56 Fender 5E3 Deluxe and 1960 Fender Champ with original box**
Opposite **1963 Fender Jaguar in Fiesta Red**

THROUGH THE ROOF

After college, Blakely married his high school sweetheart and went to work for his father's roofing business. Travelling around the state with work proved fruitful when it came to guitars, too: "We covered most of Mississippi, so I was all over the state daily. Back then you could walk into a smalltown pawn shop in Mississippi – we had a lot – and still find vintage Fenders, Gibsons, Rickenbackers, Martins..."

During his daily routes, Kris would stop at pawn shops, old music shops and call in on musicians. Buying and getting leads on guitars and amps – always picking up his weekly copy of *TradeWinds* magazine for the local yard-sale listings – like most collectors, Kris would keep some of his treasures but also (despite sometimes regretting it later) sell them on, "to make a few dollars to keep my guitar-collecting addiction going."

"When the internet and eBay came along, the pawn shop deals slowly began to diminish," he remembers. "It was the end of an era. Back in the late 1990s I was checking out a roof leak in a customer's attic and found a pre-Civil War Martin parlour guitar. Regretfully, I sold it on eBay to a gentleman in Australia. And I guess my last real pawn shop prize was a 1966 Candy Apple Red

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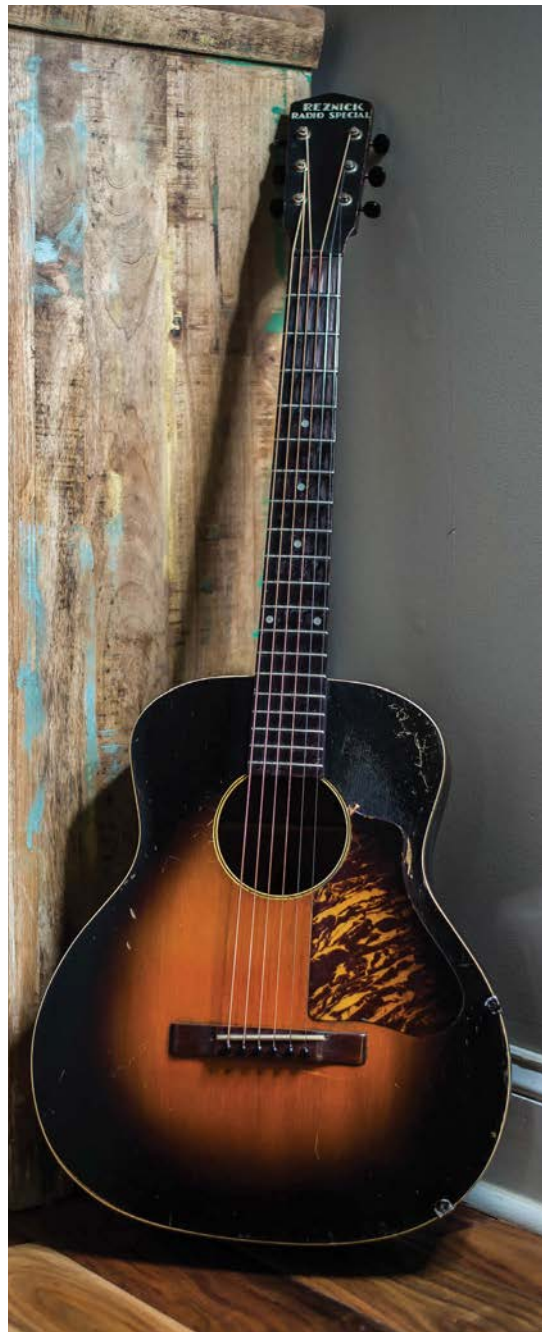


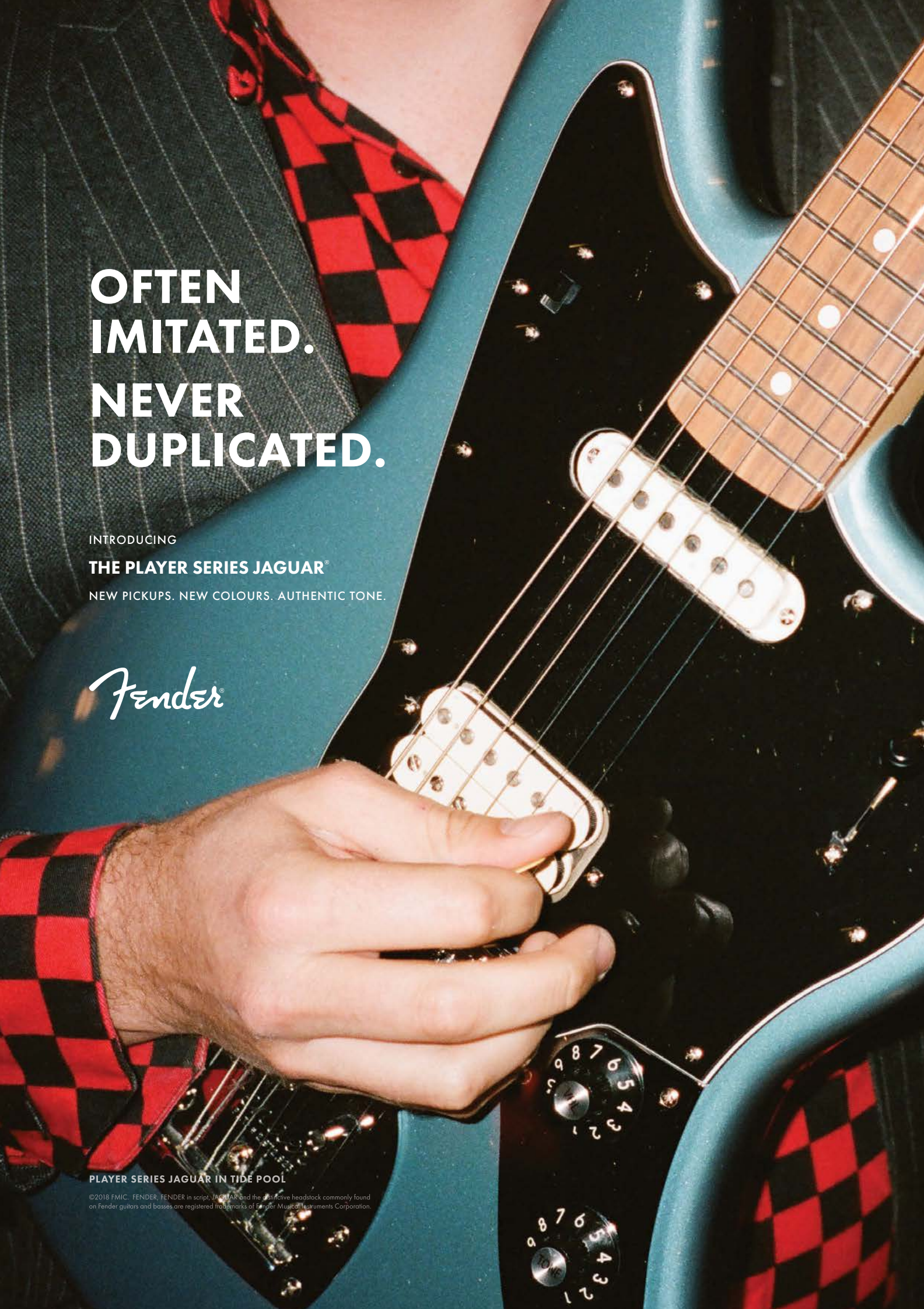
Above and right **1934 Gibson L-75 and Gibson-built 1937 Reznick that travelled with their former owners through the Pacific and Europe respectively during WWII**

Strat I found back in 2000, which ironically I also sold on eBay to a guy in California.

"In late 2004 I went through a pretty dark time in my life and just stopped playing and collecting for about five years. As BB said, 'The thrill is gone'. I mean they just sat in my music room and collected dust, I didn't even open the door to that room anymore. In 2010 I heard that Gibson was releasing a recreation of Paul Kossoff's famous Les Paul, and being a fan of Paul Kossoff, I had to have it. Since then I have found contentment and enjoyment in collecting again. Fried Okra was back!"

ALL RIGHT NOW

Kris didn't stop with Gibson Custom's recreation of Paul Kossoff's Les Paul, however. In 2016 he had an opportunity to acquire the real thing. "Since the day I played Mike's 1959 Les Paul, 28 years ago, I had the fever for a Burst," he admits. "Over the years I had collected quite an arsenal of guitars, but not a real Burst. One day as I looked over my horde, I thought to myself, if I would thin the herd, I could buy a Burst. Okay, that's settled. What Burst would I buy? And with so many fakes and questionable Bursts out there, I'm not taking any chances."



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Opposite **1969 Stratocaster formerly owned by Chris Traynor of Bush**
Above left **1963 Stratocaster with Fender Custom Shop Tobacco Barn amplifier**
Above right **1958 Stratocaster rescued from the great Nashville flood of 2010 and 1964 Stratocaster in Bulwin 'sunglasses' case**

Although in some respects the internet has made it tougher for the guitar collector to get what they want for the price they want to pay, this time the web came to the rescue: "Thanks to The Les Paul Forum and friends, David Plues, Vic DaPra, Charlie Daughtry, Mike Slubowski, Tom Wittrock, Joe Bonamassa, Scott Softy, Drew Winn et cetera... I was able to come to a decision that made sense.

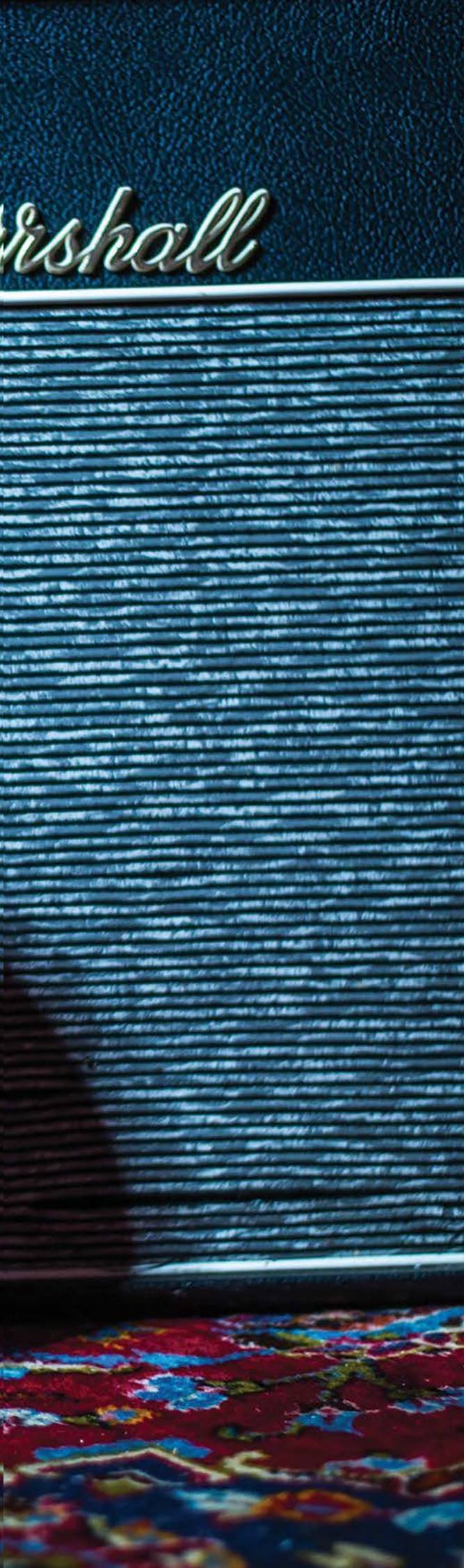
"In 2016 David Plues emailed me and asked if I was interested in the Kossoff Burst. I first thought, yeah right. Me? I'm not worthy of Kossoff's Burst. Besides, I would catch flack from the Kossoff fans for owning it and it not going to a professional player. My pal Vic DaPra said, 'If you want that Burst, get it. And don't worry about what anyone says.' Good enough for me. So, negotiating began, contracts were drawn up, pay schedules agreed on. David Plues was very instrumental in mediating the whole thing, a genuine Scotsman and a great friend.

"The hard part of thinning the herd began, so I called up my good friend Drew Winn to come and load up his van and get to selling. My wife Tonya and daughter Ana were both very excited about the Kossoff acquisition. I think as a collector, your family can get a little complacent about guitars, and they don't ever get as excited as we do. So to have them be so enthusiastic about this was awesome. At first I was going to just hop on a plane, go get it and come home. But I thought, why not make this a family vacation?"

"I FIRST THOUGHT, ME? I'M NOT WORTHY OF KOSSOFF'S BURST"

The ultimate guitar-buying trip ended up being combined with a sightseeing holiday, as Kris and his family explored Edinburgh and its beautiful surroundings. But it was soon time for the main event: "As we travelled via train from Edinburgh to Newcastle along the North Sea, I was able to reflect on the fact that in a couple of hours I was going to be the new caretaker of one of the most iconic guitars of all time. And that's when it hit me, it hit me like a brick

PRIVATE COLLECTION



thunderstorm. I am going to own Paul Kossoff's legendary broke-neck Les Paul.

"Upon arrival at the station we met David Plues and [the Kossoff Burst's then-owner] Arthur Ramm, from where they drove us to Arthur's home. Arthur said, 'Well, let's see what you travelled all this way for.' Those are the words I will remember for the rest of my life. And there in his music room was Paul Kossoff's infamous Burst. I was so excited that I was trembling, I completely forgot how to play. I couldn't even play a simple blues shuffle that my father taught me when I was a kid. I think for Arthur it was a very emotional time, as he had been the amazing caretaker of it for 40 years since Koss's passing."

MUSEUM PIECES

The Kossoff Les Paul is far from being the only guitar in the Blakely collection with a great deal of history attached to it. His treasure trove also contains a 1934 Gibson L-75 and Gibson-built 1937 Reznick that travelled with their former owners through the Pacific and Europe respectively during the Second World War. "I love World War II history and have collected many items from the European theatre and the Pacific theatre of WWII," says

Opposite **1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard previously owned by Free legend Paul Kossoff**
Above **Early 1957 Les Paul Goldtop (pre PAF sticker) and 1967 Marshall 18-watt 2x10 combo. 1952 Les Paul with 1950s Gibson dealer sign**

Opposite **1959 Les Paul Junior formerly owned by Martin Barre of Jethro Tull**
Above left **1965 Firebird III**
Above right **1963 SG Special with factory-fitted Lyre tailpiece, and 1965 Pelham Blue SG Standard**
Above **1982 Epiphone 'open book' headstock made-in-Kalamazoo SGs**

Kris. "Since I have a passion for guitars, I have always wanted a stringed instrument from that period. One day I received a message from a friend and fellow collector Arthur Forni, that he had found a 1937 Reznick on the internet and said he knew I would be interested in it. Of course I had to have it.

"It belonged to Norman Byerly, who had carved on the back his tour as he travelled through the European theatre of World War II. It is a Gibson-made model KG-11 [usually seen badged as Kalamazoo – Ed] built for the Reznick music shop out of Greensboro, North Carolina. Shortly after, Arthur messaged me about a 1934 Gibson L-75. Again, I had to have it. Belonging to Emmett H Atkinson, this one was taken to the Pacific theatre of WWII. It was hand-painted in true early American art form, a long-gone skill. Finding two guitars, one from each theatre of World War II, is definitely one of the highlights in my collecting career."

Although Kris already has a pretty comprehensive collection, we suspect that he isn't finished just yet. "Most definitely" is his response when we ask if there's anything he'd still like to add. "I would love to add a Fender Broadcaster and Nocaster to, as Joe B calls it, the 'Okra-seum'."

SOME MUSICAL BREAKTHROUGHS HAPPEN IN STUDIOS. SOME IN GARAGES.

And some in forests.

ON A DUSTY ROAD OUTSIDE YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON, YOU CAN PEER INTO THE AFRICAN FOREST AND SEE SOMETHING TOTALLY OUT OF PLACE: VILLAGERS PLANTING EBONY SAPLINGS. ALL SUPPORTED BY A GUITAR MANUFACTURER FROM EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA. DESPITE THE FACT THAT EBONY HAS BEEN USED IN GUITAR AND VIOLIN FINGERBOARDS FOR CENTURIES, THE MUSIC INDUSTRY HAD DONE VERY LITTLE TO REPLANT IT. SINCE WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO EVER MAKE GUITARS WITHOUT EBONY, WE TEAMED UP WITH SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST RESEARCHERS AND FORESTERS TO STUDY HOW TO REPLANT IT ON A LARGE SCALE. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, WE'RE PLANTING, GROWING, AND HARVESTING EBONY SUSTAINABLY. ONE LOOK INTO THAT FOREST IN CAMEROON REVEALS SOMETHING ELSE SPROUTING: HOPE. NOT JUST FOR EBONY, BUT FOR THE FUTURE OF TONEWOODS WORLDWIDE. WATCH THE WHOLE STORY *at taylorguitars.com/ebonyproject.*

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If you've played in a band at any point in the last quarter of a century, the chances are you've been on stage with one of Marshall's Dual Super Lead amplifiers. Since they launched in the 1990s, the DSL range has become a gigging staple for Marshall fans who want versatility, power and gig-ready reliability. And now, thanks to our friends in Bletchley, we're giving one lucky reader the chance to win the do-it-all new DSL20C model for themselves.

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The Dual Super Lead has been a backline mainstay for nearly three decades, but Marshall hasn't rested on its laurels with one of its most popular and successful products, and the company overhauled the range for 2018, launching the new amps at January's Winter NAMM Show in Anaheim, California.

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The DSL really is a do-it-all combo for gigging and recording guitarists who want that classic Marshall tone and more – more gain, more flexibility, and more inspirational tones. To find out more about the Marshall DSL range, visit **www.marshall.com**, and to be in with a chance of winning this DSL20C for yourself, simply head to the link below and answer the following question:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/marshalldsl

Q Which of these guitarists has NOT had a Marshall signature amp?

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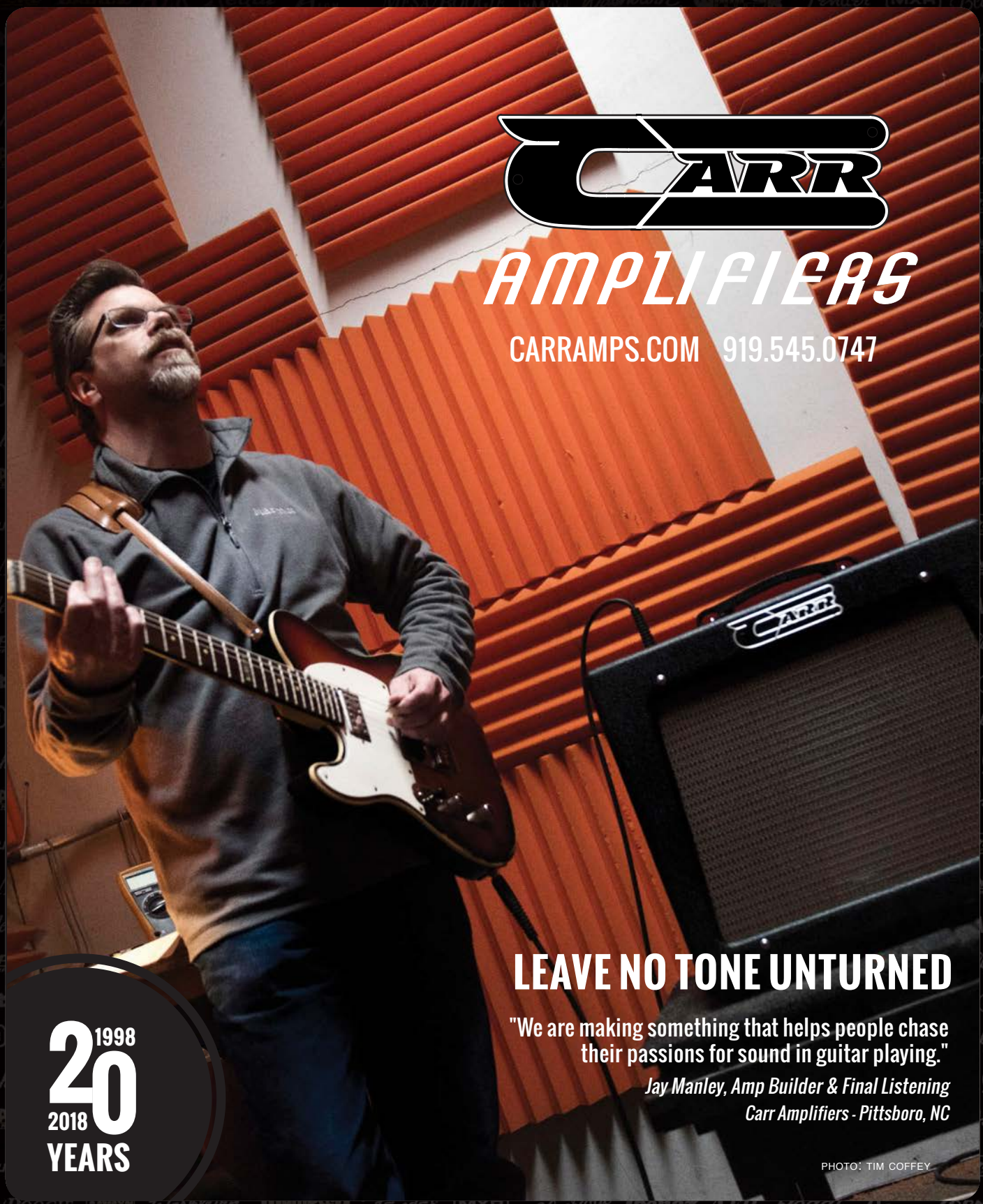

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Letters from *America*

SAUL KOLL

KOLL GUITAR CO

Portland, Oregon has a reputation as being a bit of an unconventional place to live, so it's fitting that since the early 90s, luthier Saul Koll has been hand-crafting guitars there that are also a little bit out of the ordinary...

I first encountered Saul Koll's guitars several years ago after tiring of 'the same old thing,' and deliberately seeking out something different, fresh and original, yet familiar enough to feel 'classic'. That's exactly what I found, as it also happens to be a concise description of what Koll guitars deliver. That and, of course, plenty more by way of quality, style, and a certain elusive magic that so many of us seek in a unique electric guitar. Since that first exploration I have owned a few different examples of his workmanship, and currently include one in my thinned-down arsenal – a Super Glide Almighty done out in triple-bucker Les Paul Custom style, which I love dearly.

Saul is perfectly capable of making 'just another guitar' – something functional, good-sounding, reliable, playable – but if that's all that his craft came down to, Saul Koll likely wouldn't bother building guitars at all. This guy got into it for the artistry and the self-expression of the craft, and one Koll guitar owner after another will tell you that he delivers these qualities consistently.

AMERICAN GARAGE

Like a lot of guitar makers, Saul Koll was an habitual tinkerer as a kid growing up north of Los Angeles, California. "I found myself into woodwork and [Meccano] sets, models," he told me. "I was never really into the sports. I was happy by myself in the garage building stuff. I picked up guitar when I was 12 and started taking classical guitar lessons, and then more folk guitar lessons, and eventually moved to electric guitar. So that's who I was when I was in high school: I was making stuff in the garage, and I played the guitar."

The more he got into music, though, the more his home-town locale just didn't cut it. 'North of LA' sounds like it would be a hip enough location, but as Koll describes it, "I was in this little town north of Los Angeles called Newhall. Now it's a commuter town for LA, but back then [late 1970s] if you were heading north to San Francisco you would pass this town that was like the last gasp, just a dusty little shithole. There was nothing to do there. We didn't get the good radio stations like K-Rock like friends of mine who grew up south of there, who got to hear punk rock and all that stuff."

Yet rumour had it there was plenty going on out there in musicland, and a revolution of sorts was in the making: "We had older brothers who would go over the hill into the valley and go see [punk bands] The Weirdos, or The Plugs, and all this kind of stuff, so we were hearing these stories of all this stuff that was happening. So I just needed to get out of there. There was no live music happening in that town, other than cover bands in bars." As it has for countless thousands of kids over the years, college provided a way out of said last-gasp town and in to the big wide world. And even if Saul had no idea what he wanted to study, he knew that he wanted to go.

At San Diego State University in southern California, a sample of general courses taken during his freshman year – as is often required of first-year American university students – landed Saul in an art class, and although he'd never previously had anything to do with art, something clicked. "When I was in that department it felt just like I had felt back in my garage in Newhall," he relates. "So suddenly I had a name for all that stuff I'd been doing, which was 'art'. Not that it was really art, but it was like I'd found my tribe in the art department. I got involved in the sculpture department – that's what really interested me. They had a really good wood shop and a really good metal shop. We were casting bronze, aluminium, we were forging things, welding things." Put that experience together with Saul's rediscovery of Irving Sloane's book Classic Guitar Construction, which

he now had the practical skill set to tackle – what with its emphasis on tooling, jig making, the construction of inside and outside body moulds and bending forms – and a guitar-maker was born.

ON THE BENCH

After college, on the strength of his art degree and one guitar he'd built on his kitchen table, Saul got a job as a repairman at World Of Strings in Long Beach, the south-LA suburb to which he and his wife Dede had relocated. Initially the offer of a part-time bench in the busy repair shop was taken up just to help make ends meet between his band's brief out-and-back van tours, but the more he got his hands on a range of acoustic and electric instruments, the more he honed what was becoming his true vocation.

"The owner of the place, Jon Peterson, was really well known for his stand-up bass work," Saul tells us, "so he did all the orchestra instruments for the LA area, which included both the Philharmonic and the rockabilly guys, Slim Jim from the Stray Cats, all these serious guys would bring their basses in, so I got to see how a professional works with his client to try to get the most out of an instrument and work at a high level. While that was happening, on another bench a guy was setting up a Floyd [Rose vibrato] – since this was the 80s – and on another bench a guy'd be re-hairing a violin bow, then somebody's restoring a pre-war Martin. So I was just kind of bouncing around doing all the odd jobs."

Saul's first actual guitar building commissions came, though, from the unexpected world of seven- and eight-string jazz guitars, which he custom-built for notable jazz men Ron Esceheté and Robert Conti – both of whom gave lessons out of the shop. "I was making my first real guitars," he relates, "but I had these pro players playing them, so I was in a really lucky situation. It was all by chance. I was just looking for a job so I didn't have to sleep on somebody's couch in between these van tours. Meanwhile I was kind of developing my own building style that became more and more of a deal. I was looking at myself as an actual guitar maker; this wasn't just a whim, or a part-time thing. It kind of became who I was."

GLIDING NORTH

Part of defining himself as a guitar-maker involved designing his own, unique electric guitar body shape, which Saul first devised for a bandmate who needed something a little different way back around 1990 or 1991. "He was a really big guy, six-foot-four or five, and he had borrowed the G&L ASAT Tele that I had at that time, and it just looked like this tiny little thing on him. I thought, 'Man, you need something big!' So it was probably sitting around some beers or something, he said 'You're a guitar maker, why don't you make me something?'

"I started sketching guitars out – saying 'What are the other guitars around here?' There's a Les Paul, there's a Telecaster... let's trace those on this paper, let's trace a 335 and see what all those lines look like. I just extrapolated what I liked from all three of those guitars and pushed things around until what you know as the Glide came out. I just stuck with it. Now I look at it and it's so familiar that it just looks like any other standard shape to me, but back then it was a weird shape."

“THE EASIEST THING IS TO MAKE A GOOD INSTRUMENT. THAT’S A GIVEN. IT’S REALLY THE INTANGIBLES, THE MAGIC THAT’S ON TOP OF THAT, THAT’S WHERE IT HAPPENS”

That “weird shape” has become a modern classic of sorts, in the lines found on his flat-topped Duo Glide, archtop Super Glide Almighty, and stripped-down Junior Glide models (all of which also sport the distinctive ‘Koll quiff’ headstock), while also echoed in the Superior, Troubadour, and Super Cub models. Wherever you find it, the asymmetrical double-cutaway shape looks simultaneously original and familiar, like a lesser-seen classic you’d forgotten or just hadn’t discovered yet, and it sits equally well dressed as a Les Paul, a Gretsch-like concoction, a Tele, or several other configurations.

Shortly after establishing this flagship electric, Saul and Dede decided they’d had enough of the relentless LA congestion and sought out greener pastures. Somewhere that still had a music scene to cater to, but which would offer a little more breathing room for the rest of what makes life worth living. Explorations northward took them to Portland, Oregon – now a hip haven of the north west, but less widely known as a cultural centre back in ’92 when the Kolls landed there – and he has worked from there ever since. A part-time slot at a repair bench in Portland’s 12th Fret guitar shop helped to keep it all afloat while Saul grew his trade as a custom luthier, and bit by bit he forged a stellar reputation on word of mouth and the exposure his guitars received from several name players who took them on the road. Current and past Koll artists include Isaac Brock of Modest Mouse, Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth, Hershel Yatovitz of Chris Isaak’s band, David Torn of David Bowie and a zillion others, Peter Holmstrom of The Dandy Warhols, and Adam Levy of Norah Jones, Tracy Chapman and Ani DiFranco.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

After licensing his Glide model to Premier Builder’s Guild (PBG) around 2009, Saul continued building other models and more esoteric custom guitars on his own, until the Koll brand returned entirely to his care with the dissolution of PBG in 2016. He is currently aiming to produce approximately 100 guitars per year in his Portland shop, with part-time assistance from Matt Proctor, administrative help from his business partner Gary Hustwitt, and an occasional boost from other local luthiers when there’s a big rush on orders or a trade show to prepare for. All the while, he’s still out there playing music when he can, notably with Portland rock ’n’ rollers the Lovesores.

Of the whole PBG experience, Saul says, “I think I ended up better on the other side than I did going in. I got paid well for the whole thing. I got to learn how a different kind of business is done... Once I licensed the Glide Series to Premier Builders Guild I think there were a couple dozen dealers worldwide, and this was a reach for my name or brand that I could never do by myself.”

And while Saul was continually impressed with the quality of the guitars produced by PBG head builder Gene Baker and his team, he’s now enjoying having total control of ‘the magic’ again, and chasing that elusive extra spark that promises to makes each individual guitar more than ‘just another instrument’.

“To me, the easiest thing to do is to make a really good-playing instrument. That’s a given. It’s really the intangibles, the magic that’s on top of that, that’s where it happens. On a personal level, one of the really, really important things for me to do is to have fun, have joy, to laugh. A lot of my design decisions are based on– not a joke, but there’s got to be some humour involved somehow. I want there to be something like an Easter egg in there, to be, ‘Oh, I see why he did that. Okay!’ Just a little giggle or something like that.

“I’m not making a guitar just to make a guitar; there’s got to be some other story behind it. Maybe a tip of the hat to another builder, maybe a tip of the hat to an automobile, or echoing something else. In the same way that a really good musician, in his solo, will quote Charlie Parker or whatever. There has to be a reason for it to exist. Right now there’s 3,000 really good guitar makers out there making something a lot cheaper than what I can do. Why would you want one of mine? So I try to insert something that nobody else can insert.”

Call it magic, the Easter egg, the element of fun, or a tip of the hat to some other inspiration, most Koll players will tell you that extra something is pretty easy to locate once you start playing one of Saul’s creations.

Parallel LINES

FENDER 2018 TROUBLEMAKER TELE

On its launch at the NAMM Show in January, Fender's Senior Vice President of Products Justin Norvell said that, "The Parallel Universe celebrates the modular nature of Fender guitars, splicing together DNA from various Fender models to create off-the-wall hybrids." We previously looked at the funky Strat-Tele Hybrid, but this month's subject – the Troublemaker Tele – sees Fender look outside its own catalogue for inspiration.

The Troublemaker Tele's mahogany body and neck, bound maple top, Adjusto-matic bridge, stop tailpiece, and nitrocellulose finish are all mischievous nods towards Kalamazoo's golden-era design philosophy. But the guitar's bolt-on construction and body outline mean that it doesn't go all the way there, and when you plug in, that's very much the story, too. The Shawbucker pickups under those Wide Range-style covers deliver a pleasing mixture of humbucker grind and Tele twang, with plenty of clarity.

With street prices around the £1,600 mark, the guitar is available in Ice Tea Burst (seen here) or stunning Ice Blue Metallic, but like all Parallel Universe models, the Troublemaker Tele will only be around for a short time, so snap one up while you can! Visit fender.com for more information on the range.

THE REVERB TOP 10

VINTAGE DRIVE PEDALS

Do the old ones really sound the best? Dan Orkin of Reverb.com picks out the 10 best selling vintage drive pedals on the online marketplace for you to add to your wishlist...

We've spent the last few months charting the best selling pedals of various different types on Reverb.com, but we're going to do something different this time, by adding a chronological constraint to proceedings. There's something about vintage drive pedals that captivates guitar players to this day, whether they be ancient Tube Screamers or battered old Big Muffs, but which units come out on top?

Before we dive into the rankings, let's take a moment to define our terms. In this case, we're defining 'vintage' as any pedal produced before 1990, which seems as good a cutoff as any. As for 'drive', we're including any fuzz, distortion, overdrive, or boost pedal. In short, our interest here focuses on older pedals that can increase your gain or push your amp into breakup.

It's a wide target zone, to be sure, but the pedals on the list do all share some commonalities. Each has achieved some level of iconic status within guitar circles, and each is now sought out for the particular array of parts and 'unobtainium' that helps give these stompboxes their mystique. A modern player can, for instance, choose from hundreds of Muff-style fuzz pedals. That doesn't stop some from seeking out the original artefacts from the 70s and paying a tidy sum to land one.

Seen a vintage pedal you need on your board? Head to Reverb.com to pick one up for yourself!

1 Boss HM-2 Heavy Metal Distortion
As the name implies, the HM-2 is a full-bore distortion pedal that was designed to give metal players the crushingly brutal tones they craved. Originally produced between 1983 and 1991, the pedal has recently experienced something of a cultish rejuvenation among practitioners of modern heavy genres such as metalcore, sludge and death metal owing to its particularly biting, buzzsaw-like tone.

2 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi
A pedal that needs no introduction, the Big Muff ranks as the most successful fuzz design of all time. In this instance, we've combined sales from all the various Big Muff Pi iterations made, starting in the late 60s including such revered versions as the 'Triangle' Muff and 'Ram's Head' Muff.

3 Boss SD-1 Super Overdrive
Another entry from Boss, the SD-1 is essentially the Boss equivalent of the Ibanez Tube Screamer. The circuits are nearly identical save for the use of asymmetrical clipping of the Boss version. This pedal is still in production, but some players seek out the earliest examples from the 80s when Boss still built its pedals in Japan.

4 DOD Overdrive Preamp 250
Built around a LM741 op-amp chip, the DOD 250 sits right up there with Tube Screamer and SD-1 as a genre-defining overdrive. Vintage units aren't cheap, however, but it was recently reissued by DOD, offering this toneful machine to a new generation at a more affordable price point.

5 MXR Distortion+
The MXR Distortion+ has been used by everyone from Jerry Garcia to Bob Mould. While really more of an overdrive or boost than a proper distortion, this stately MXR stompbox can cover a respectably wide range of different drive tones making it a common pedalboard fixture.

6 Pro Co RAT
Released in a few different enclosures and with different op-amp chips in its run, there is a strong collector market for old RAT pedals. The RAT is one of the original distortion pedals and is known for the snarling, jagged character of its high-gain tone.

7 Ibanez TS10 Tube Screamer
The Ibanez Tube Screamer has been released in a number of variations since the late-70s, and for years, the TS10 model (which followed the TS-808 and TS9) was not held in particularly high esteem. Lately though, interest has been on the rise, due in part to its use by John Mayer.

8 Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer
Arguably the most popular overdrive of all time, the Tube Screamer essentially popularised the overdrive pedal concept when it was introduced in the late 70s. While not as coveted as the earlier TS-808, TS9 Tube Screamers from the 80s still rank as collector's items on today's market and can be modded to 808 spec.

9 Boss DF-2 Super Feedbacker and Distortion
This basic distortion from Boss added a novel feature by which players could hold down the foot switch to engage a feedback loop. You can imagine how these contraptions might resonate with modern noise-obsessed players interested in creating enveloping drones with their rigs.

10 Boss DS-1 Distortion
This year marks the 40th anniversary of the humble DS-1, and this simple, affordable pedal continues to sell well. It may not be the most interesting sounding drive on the list, but it's cheap and available, and was good enough for Kurt Cobain...

ESTRONS

A band that aren't known for side-stepping taboos and are more than happy to challenge social conventions, Estrons are making waves with their new brand of female-fronted, catchy and aggressive rock music, propped up by Cardiff's infamous Womanby Street. Guitarist Rhodri Daniel tells all to Sam Roberts...

When we talk to Rhodri Daniel about his musical beginnings, it's surprising to hear of his early disinterest in the guitar, given the whirlwind year his band, Estrons, have just had. "My mother pestered me for years to pick up an instrument. I resisted as I was always more interested in climbing mountains and jumping into rivers," he declares.

His interest was eventually piqued, however, through the need to better his closest rival – his cousin – rather than any great urge to follow in the footsteps of his musical idols. "One day when I was 11, my cousin comes round and brings his new acoustic guitar to show me what he could do... I wasn't going to be outdone by that little punk! So I picked up my mum's battered old classical guitar and we battled it out."

Despite Rhodri's initial interest coming more from competitiveness than a passion for music, he'd caught the bug, and he began playing in Welsh language bands in no short order. "At the age of 14, my friends and I toured Wales in Welsh language bands," he recalls. "It was incredible fun and we got up to no good for years. Eventually we wanted to capture it on record... it sounded so awful that I contemplated never doing it again!"

Following some time spent away from the music industry while studying and travelling, Rhodri, along with vocalist Taliesyn Källström, has returned to what he knows best – rock music.

> "We don't particularly set out to address certain socio-political themes in our songs, but we inevitably always do"

Estrons formed through a chance encounter in Cardiff, with Rhodri quickly inviting Taliesyn to listen to demos he'd recorded after bonding over similar tastes in music. "I met this stranger, called Taliesyn Källström, who had the coolest name I'd ever heard. She had great taste in music, so I invited her to listen to some demos. With some trepidation she came to this derelict musical commune I was living in at the time to share ideas, and luckily for me she could actually sing as well."

DOING TIME

With their debut album *You Say I'm Too Much, I Say You're Not Enough* due out in October, Estrons distinct rock influences are already apparent on their singles *Lilac* and *Drop*. The former is a fascinating mashupthat sounds like political punk legends the Dead Kennedys had a jam session with Wolf Alice. The latter, however, was written in jail...

"*Drop* was written by Tali from a jail cell, so it's pretty angry, but you'll have to ask her about that," Rhodri admits. "*Lilac* was written when I was in a particularly agitated mood,

hence why the music is constantly shifting and aggressive. Tali heard it and wrote the lyrics immediately inspired by an encounter she had just had with a crying teenage girl in the early hours of the morning."

Estrons' considered and contemporary sound didn't arrive overnight though. Taliesyn and Rhodri's musical differences caused more than their fair share of constructive arguments, alongside relentless touring schedules over several years – including a stint supporting Slaves – and a turnaround of no less than 12 band members.

Most bands wouldn't have lasted through those tumultuous years, but Estrons seem to have come out stronger, not least because of an early belief in what they set out to achieve. "The 'sound' hasn't truly changed since the beginning, we decided there and then that was the sound, and we knew what we were doing. What has changed is the songs," he reflects. "We've matured and the songs and lyrics are harder hitting now as it's been pretty tough at times, but now we have the songs to make it worthwhile."

I PREDICT A RIOT

Estrons are now settled in both line-up and compositional approach, and with support slots alongside Garbage and political activists/punk band Pussy Riot already in the bag, their September tour, which sees them visiting Europe for the first time, is building up to be one of the most hotly anticipated rock tours of the year.

Despite playing alongside bands that are steeped in cultural activism, however, Rhodri doesn't believe that it's something Estrons purposely aim to address themselves. "We don't particularly set out to address certain socio-political themes in our songs, but we inevitably always do, these things are happening to Tali and she is giving her own opinions and experiences of them through her music."

With the album tour running up until and into 2019, Cardiff's next great rock exports show no sign of slowing down, with album number two already in the pipeline. "We're writing the second album now, it's nine tenths done so far!" he enthuses. "To be honest we're just going to keep doing what we're doing and exploring the sound. If people want to turn up to our gigs and hear it, great. If not, no worries!"

Estrons may mean strangers in Welsh, but soon they'll be anything but alien to those keeping a keen eye on the British rock landscape.

You Say I'm Too Much, I Say You're Not Enough **is out 5 October on Gofod Records.**

Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: women that play guitar, and a guitar that's straight out of a comic book...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

CLEARING A PATH

Dear *TGM*, thank you for your timely, well-written article 'Woman Tone'. In an age in which vitriol and anger seem to dominate so many discussions, it was refreshing to read something thoughtful and clear-headed.

I have never understood the fear and rage that some feel regarding women who play guitar. On a personal level, my 14-year-old niece is developing a real affinity and fondness for the electric guitar (and she's decided she prefers offsets, which makes me even prouder of her) and I feel like articles such as this one go some way toward clearing the path for her of nonsensical notions that girls and women have no place behind a six-string.

On a purely self-interested level, I want as many different people as possible to be picking up the guitar. Why would anyone want to limit the number of voices and minds that want to apply themselves to an instrument? We're all better off if we have more people to listen to, play with, and be inspired by. More perspectives means more variation and invention, which is the lifeblood of music. We may be living in an unreasonable time, but that is the most important time for us to be reasonable.

Nathan Radke, via email

TGM **Thanks for your email Nathan, we're glad the 'Woman Tone' feature struck a chord with you, as we hope it has done with many of our readers. Making female guitar players feel welcome in our community is something we can all help with, and it sounds like you're doing a fine job with your niece.**

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Dear *TGM*, Over the last few years I've developed a bit of a habit of buying broken and neglected guitars, fixing them up, sometimes restoring them, sometimes customising them, but always getting a great kick out of re-animating an instrument that's been rendered silent and unloved through no fault of its own.

A couple of years ago I bought an Epiphone Rivera P-93 semi that was quite literally in bits; it had a snapped off headstock, the neck was completely removed, and its pickups and all of its hardware had also been stripped away. It was pretty much just a shattered shell of a guitar!

Anyway, I'd always wanted a single pickup P-90 Junior-type guitar so I decided to go down that route when bringing the Rivera back from the dead. To breathe life back into the guitar, I installed a wraparound bridge, a Bare Knuckle dog-ear P-90 at the bridge, Grover tuners, and a vintage wiring harness. To top it off I asked my daughters and their friend to customise it using my old *Dan Dare* and the Mekon cartoon strips from my pile of Eagle comics I still had from the early 80s. Here's the result [see left]. We call it The Epiphone Mekon!

Jon Wells, via email

TGM **Thanks for your email Jon – one of the great things about restoring a guitar is that you can personalise it in any way you see fit, and you've certainly done that with the Mekon!**

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you win an Overdrive Straps Seatbelt Strap worth £35*! The hand-made classic guitar strap made from the strongest safety belt material, with full-grain belting leather on the tips. * For more information, visit www.overdrivestraps.com

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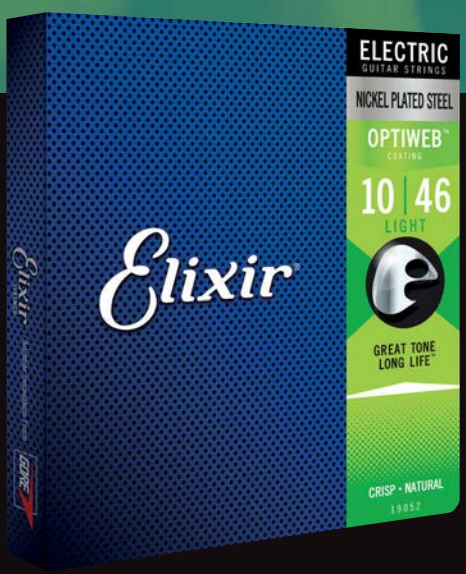

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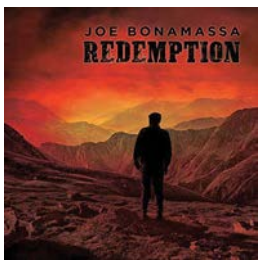
New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases



Joe Bonamassa
Redemption

Joe recently posted a video to his Facebook page of himself playing stinging blues licks in 1989 – aged 12 – on what looks like a giant Telecaster. It's proof, if any doubt existed, that he was better at the guitar back then than many of us ever will be. But while the present-day Bonamassa has elevated his status to that of a vintage-guitar-wielding, endlessly touring commercial blues powerhouse, it's amazing to consider that on his 13th solo album, his love for the guitar hasn't changed in 30 years.

On this third-album-in-a-row comprising all-original material, the Shirley/Bonamassa axis returns to work once again, but keeps things fresh by recording in locations ranging from The Cave in Australia to Studio At The Palms in Las Vegas, and by adding Reese Wynans on keys and a pair of rhythm-guitar players in Kenny Greenburg and Doug Lancio. Does Joe Bonamassa really need a hand when it comes to the guitar? "I still wanted him to play hard," says Shirley. "But I needed him to be a reactive player, so that was one of the reasons for introducing the other guitar players, and it was sensational."

Opener *Evil Mama* opens the channel to Zeppelin with its tongue-in-cheek *Rock And Roll* intro and *Immigrant Song* riffery, while *King Bee Shakedown* is a marked contrast – a supercharged horn-laden take on boogie blues and rockabilly, with a tearing slide solo. Bonamassa regards *Self-Inflicted Wounds* as among his best compositions, and its heartbroken, minor-key balladry is destined to soundtrack many a late-night drive across the desert, though the closing reverb-laden solo is all-too-brief. The Tom Waits-esque barroom piano of *Pick Up The Pieces* is less comfortable territory, but benefits from some flashes of atmospheric dobro. *The Ghost Of Macon Jones*, on the other hand, has a vintage sonic feel and a beefed-up Tulsa Sound, with Bonamassa trading vocals with Nashville singer Jamey Johnson and taking advantage of open-string notes to showcase yet another facet of his stunning lead skills.

Another ghost – that of Albert King – inhabits *Just 'Cos You Can Don't Mean You Should*, while there are more sleazy blues thrills to be had on *I've Got Some Mind Over What Matters* and the closer *Love Is A Gamble*. The title track and *Stronger Now In Broken Places* offer acoustic-based respite from an album that's as eclectic, musically ambitious and boldly assured as anything he's done to date. The boy has certainly done good. **BW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Eric Clapton, Led Zeppelin, Albert King*

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

Billy F Gibbons
THE BIG BAD BLUES

After 2015's Cuban-flavoured *Perfectamundo*, this album's title leaves little doubt as to where the Reverend is headed here. Greasy, grooving slices of rock 'n' blues were always the ZZ Top main-man's bread and butter, and he steps back into it on *The Big Bad Blues* like he's donning an old pair of slippers. Of the 11 tracks here, five are covers, but Gibbons throws himself into everything with typical gusto. Opener *Missin' Yo Kissin'* starts us off barnstorming fashion – it's raw, raunchy and with a guitar riff straight out of *La Grange* – ably assisted by the pounding drums of former GN'R man Matt Sorum. From there things get progressively slower and moodier, leading to the slow jam of Muddy Waters' *Standing Around Crying* – Gibbons wringing every drop of feeling out of both guitar and heavily distorted harmonica to sublime effect. The only real misstep is Hawaiin-vibed closer *Crackin' Up*, but that aside, Gibbons' tone and guitar mojo is exemplary throughout *The Big Bad Blues*. While he's not hitting his 80s heights again, he's certainly rediscovered some of that hip-shaking swagger. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *ZZ Top, The Allman Brothers*

Slash ft Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators
LIVING THE DREAM

Slash's initial solo jaunts with Alter Bridge frontman Myles Kennedy felt rather like the imposingly-millinered guitarist was exorcising some of his GN'R-shaped demons – carrying the torch of what made that band so exciting and vital, while Axl eroded our good will. But now that he's finally back in Guns N' Roses, how much creative juice is left for other projects? *Living The Dream* doesn't inspire much confidence. Perhaps because GN'R is finally scratching that itch, we find Slash in a bit of an experimental mood here – augmenting his Slash-isms with various country, Latin and Southern accents. Sadly, that Southern-fried flavour is sprinkled on with the care of a teenage KFC line-cook at the back end of a double-shift – just check out the 'country *Paradise City*' of opener *The Call Of The Wild*, or the weird, sleazy Latin-rock of *Slow Grind*. The frustrating thing is that Slash remains Slash – as the incendiary guitar work of *Sugar Cane* demonstrates – it's just a shame his generational talents are being used to add respectability to such throwaway fare. **GJ**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *GN'R, Lynyrd Skynyrd*

Spiritualized
AND NOTHING HURT

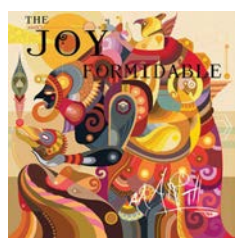
At their height of creative excess, Spiritualized had more than 120 musicians contributing to 2001's *Let It Come Down*. *And Nothing Hurt* is the very opposite of that – it was written and recorded almost entirely by Jason Pierce at home in London, and the result is one of his best records in years. Pierce said this album "sent me more mad than anything I've done before", but what's remarkable about *And Nothing Hurt* is how it doesn't feel like a one-man job. Instead, it wonderfully captures the majestic but grounded vibe of the band's live shows – particularly their recent anniversary gigs to celebrate 20 years of *Ladies And Gentleman We Are Floating In Space*. This touchstone is evident from opener, *A Perfect Miracle* – with its 3/4 beat and soaring, euphoric orchestration, it could be *Ladies And Gentlemen* Pt 2 – and this sense of familiarity continues throughout. But while past-evoking tracks such as *The Prize* and *Let's Dance* could feel tired in less accomplished hands, here it feels like catching up with an old friend. On this occasion, going mad was definitely worth it. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ride, Primal Scream, SFA*

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH

Our pick of the best of this month's other guitar releases…



The Joy Formidable
AAARTH

Welsh three-piece return with a powerful fourth album that's chock full of intricate and interesting riffs courtesy of frontwoman Ritzy Bryan

John Butler Trio
HOME

The Australian guitarist's first album in four years is a soulful and personal record that blends his technical acoustic wizardry with hip-hop and electronica

© Getty Images

REDEMPTION SONGS

During the recording sessions for his diverse new studio album, Joe Bonamassa found out that the road to *Redemption* isn't always easy, and that sometimes even the curator of one of the world's foremost guitar collections can't get the tone he wants...

STORY CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Joe Bonamassa's latest solo studio album, his 13th in 18 years, contains a rich collection of music that ranges from Zeppelin-style pomp to mellow introspection via Chicago Blues, the Tulsa Sound and plenty more besides. We catch up with him on the road in Nebraska and he reveals that, although *Redemption* was tracked over a year ago, this latest long-player is "really indicative" of what his band – augmented by several backing singers and horn players – is doing live these days.

"It was fun to make a record with our singers and horns as an entity," Joe remembers. "It was a band record, more so than just 'cut it as a three-piece and add'. It was nice to have everybody on it."

For the *Redemption* sessions, in addition to drummer Anton Fig, bassist Michael Rhodes and former Double Trouble keys player Reese Wynans (for whom Bonamassa has recently produced an album loaded with special guest cameos), producer Kevin Shirley also threw legendary Nashville session guitarists Kenny Greenberg and Doug Lancio into the mix.

"It's actually kind of liberating," remarks Joe. "They were the colour. There's a reason why these guys are studio legends, because

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they play the right stuff. They'd basically stay out of my lane going, 'Look at him over there, he's got tonnes of guitars, he plays too loud, too many notes, but there's nothing we can say or do to talk him off the ledge!'"

Although Bonamassa's live band has featured an additional guitarist in the past, he's acutely aware of what his audience wants and is currently touring without a dedicated rhythm player: "We had Kirk Fletcher play with us in 2015 and he was great, but when we revert back to sludgy blues-rock, I take up so much fucking space, I feel bad for the rhythm guitar player because sonically, I'm just a bull in a china shop. That's what they pay to see – subtlety be damned at eight o'clock!

"I used to get really up my own ass about it and think about being subtle or defaulting to the more well-worn paths or just playing less, you know? That's cool but what I've found is, the people who like my music and come to my shows, they don't wanna see that.

"We've been playing stuff off the new record for four or five months now – It was a new year so I thought I owed the fans some new songs, we tour relentlessly – and we've been doing this song called *Just 'Cos You Can Don't Mean You Should*. I way overplay on this song live, but people love it. I'm just long past the point of questioning that kind of thing now. If people clap and they like it, I feel like I've done my job."

TREBLE TROUBLE

Bonamassa's lead work on Redemption is characterised by explosive passages of fiery abandon. It turns out that this was often borne out of frustration more than design: "It was weird as I was having a hard time," he recalls. "The bulk of the main sessions for the record we recorded in Nashville last July – I won't tell you which studio – and I was having the hardest time with the guitar sound.

"I've recorded at least three studio albums – four if you count *Black Coffee*, that last record that we did with Beth [Hart] – with the same rig, essentially. Four Twins, or two Bassmans and two Twins, basically just the tweed amps. I always bring the usual suspects. It's like, let's start there before we get creative, guitar-wise. You bring your good Les Paul, your favourite Strat, your favourite Tele... stuff that has been on albums before that has stayed in tune and performed well before. I always default to that, because every time you make a record you start at zero, in my opinion."

Despite the presence of proven workhorses and his favoured tweed-powered rig, back in the control room, things were far from rosy: "I go back in and I'm listening to it and I'm thinking, 'Why does this sound like the amplifiers have no gain, and they have like a pillow on top?' Snakebite and Skinner were there, there was a 1960 Burst, there was a Flying V there, my go-to Strats, Teles and stuff like that... but it didn't matter what I plugged into it, it all sounded like Herb Ellis with a 175 and the tone rolled off. I'm like, 'It's killing me!' It's great if you are playing Herb Ellis but if you are playing blues-rock it's not strident enough."

© Jen Rosenstein

"HOW DID IT GO FROM JIMI HENDRIX WITH THREE STACKS, ALL ON, TO 'A FENDER PRINCETON IS TOO LOUD'? I CAN'T GET MY HEAD AROUND IT"

Despite simplifying the signal chain, they were still having problems: "So I'm getting this shit from the engineer, and they're like, we have you running through this and that... I said, 'Pull all that shit out. Do me a favour, pull it all out.' All of a sudden it started to kind of open up and I'm like, 'See, that's the sound!' And then track after track, after track, I'm really struggling. In the headphones it sounded fine. In the control room, Kevin and I were going, 'Man, this really sounds dull!' And I've got the High Power [Twins] on the bright channel, with the presence almost all the way up, the treble all the way up. Man, these things are peeling paint in the room!

"They kept blaming the old gear, or it's this, it's that. I'm like, 'I don't mean to sound arrogant, but I will... I've done a few albums this fucking year with this rig, and it's not what it sounds like!' We never managed to get it sorted out, and it was really a buzzkill. I was like, 'Kevin, do we have this?' I was thinking I'd have to go back and recut all the guitars, 'cause it didn't sound like me, in spite of my best efforts. So some of the things when I listen back, I think the performances were affected by what I was hearing or what I was not hearing. And it was kind of a bummer, you know?"

CLEAR THE DESK

Eventually Bonamassa and Shirley figured out that it was actually the monitoring section of the studio mixing desk that was colouring the sound: "We have our own mics that this guy in South Africa makes for us called Tul [www.tulmicrophones.com]. They're on the amps now, right here in Omaha. When you

put the fader up, it sounds like the amp. Every time. I have one in my studio bag. It'll sound like the amp, guaranteed, you don't have to mess with it. But it got to the point where we were putting 57s on it, we were putting Beyers on it, Neumanns... nothing.

"And we figured out that it was the new API console. The monitoring section has its own kind of colour to it. In the studio I just want them to give me what the amp is doing. And not to sound bourgeoisie but that's why the Neve console is the best for that – especially guitar-wise. If you have a shitty guitar sound then the Neve is gonna give you the best representation of that shitty guitar sound. There's a reason why Rupert Neve is such a legend. I'd never really figured that out until I'd had three and a half weeks literally struggling, to say the least, with something that I've always taken for granted."

VOLUME WARS

Studio lessons learned, we imagine that one of the busiest musicians in the business has a few tips for dealing with the challenges of live performance, too, from bad monitoring to overzealous sound engineers who insist on low stage volume levels.

"Here's the thing I've always found with singing, here's the trick," says Joe. "If you're ever in a situation where the monitors are so bad that they are hurting more than they are helping, turn 'em off. Just use the PA. Sometimes if wedges have limiters on them, or if they are EQ'd poorly or if they don't have enough headroom or whatever, it's actually singing with less, it vacuums sound out. You are better off just turning them off and using the force."

Returning to the subject of paint-peeling volume, it seems that Bonamassa could be the main to front the campaign to reclaim 'loud' for guitarists. "When did the guitar become the Typhoid Mary of instruments?" he laughs, exasperated. "When did loud guitars become an open sewer in the pristine wilderness of rock 'n' roll? When did that happen?! Now it's like, 'Oh no no, don't even use a fucking amp!' A Champ is too loud here. Let's use a POD or a Fractal. When did it happen? How did it go from Jimi Hendrix with three stacks, all on, to 'a Fender Princeton is too loud'? I can't get my head around it. It's almost laughable. Drummers are behind Plexiglas, everything is isolated.

"To me it doesn't sound better. It makes a band play differently. It sounds like robots. It's the same in the studio, where everything has to be so isolated, and engineers will high-five themselves, going 'there's not a stitch of bleed on this track.' Then you're going, 'there ain't a stitch of soul on this.' All of my favourite records have shit everywhere. Mistakes. Out of tune vocals. Guitars that are everywhere, bass that's everywhere. It's great!" Amen to that.

Joe Bonamassa's new album, *Redemption*, is released by Provogue/Mascot Label Group on 21 September. Read our review of the new record on p44.

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Surfer's Paradise

With a 30th anniversary edition of the Pixies' debut album *Surfer Rosa* about to hit the shelves, Black Francis and Joey Santiago speak to Gary Walker about Les Pauls, tennis balls and the legacy of a timeless classic...

"The flashes of memory I have are being in a little side room, not the main room, with my little Peavey amp, and I remember him sticking these little microphones in it with a little roach clip. I remember doing *Vamos* and throwing things at the guitar, I want to say they were tennis balls..."

Holed up in a hotel room in Des Moines, Iowa during the early days of the Pixies' recent North American tour with Weezer, Joseph Albert 'Joey' Santiago is recalling the scenes inside Boston's Q Division Studios in December 1987. It was there that he and his bandmates, under the guidance of producer Steve Albini, made an album that would go some way towards shaping the future of alternative guitar music.

Surfer Rosa turned 30 this year, and the Pixies' debut album remains a timeless alt-rock record that cast a long shadow over the 1990s and beyond. The band's British label 4AD is marking the occasion with a Deluxe Edition of *Come On Pilgrim... It's Surfer Rosa* – containing reissues of their debut EP, *Come On Pilgrim*, *Surfer Rosa* and live LP *Live From The Fallout Shelter* – while in October and November, the Pixies will take over London's iconic Roundhouse venue for five nights to play both records from start to finish.

Recorded in 10 days, costing just $10,000 – with 4AD paying Albini a flat fee of $1,500 – the Pixies' debut patented the quiet-loud dynamic that would inspire the likes of Kurt Cobain, Billy Corgan and Radiohead and help accelerate the advance of grunge through a sterile musical landscape. David Bowie called it "the most compelling music outside of Sonic Youth made in the entire 80s" and Thom Yorke likened being asked to follow Pixies at Coachella in 2004 to being supported by The Beatles.

DON'T WANT MY MTV

At the heart of this dark, sexy and surreal album – replete with tales of violence, venereal disease, incest and Catholic repression – lies the seemingly effortless dynamic between the furious surf-thrash lead playing of Philippines-born Santiago and the rock-solid rhythm of his former University of Massachusetts roommate Charles Thompson, aka Black Francis.

The pair had bonded over Black Flag and Cars records before Francis left New England for a six-month exchange programme in Puerto Rico. Sitting in San Juan's backstreet bars with only a Walkman and tapes by the Ramones, Talking Heads and Iggy Pop for company, he began to write his future classic. It wasn't long before he made the call to Santiago to get the band together.

The pair quit college, moved to Boston and a legendary advert for a bass player who liked Hüsker Dü and Peter, Paul And Mary led to the arrival of Kim Deal, known ironically inside the band as Mrs John Murphy – the name of her husband. Murphy's Radio Shack workmate David Lovering was recruited as drummer.

Central to the Pixies' manifesto was a rejection of the mainstream pop, MOR rock and hair metal that dominated the charts in 1987. "I just didn't want to have anything to do with a big, big, big solo, probably because I couldn't handle it," says Santiago, laughing.

"My take on it was that mainstream guitar had a lot of typewriting skills. They were typing as fast as they can, and I couldn't hear it. The only thing that was impressive about it for me was the speed – how can they play so fast? But in the back of my mind I was like, 'I don't care'. It just wasn't my thing. I'm more like a classic rock guy. You gotta hear some riffs or something you're going to remember, and that requires less notes.

"Our music is unconventional. There's a lot of half-steps, a lot of chords that don't theoretically go with the key, but it seems to work. We knock off two beats here on some line and not necessarily go four, so we have all these twists and turns. After a while it got second nature to us – counting verses in four, we'd have chunks of three a lot of the time. Then we'd be like, 'this is the weird one'. 'Why's it weird?' 'Because it's a chunk of four. Watch out, this is the normal one!'"

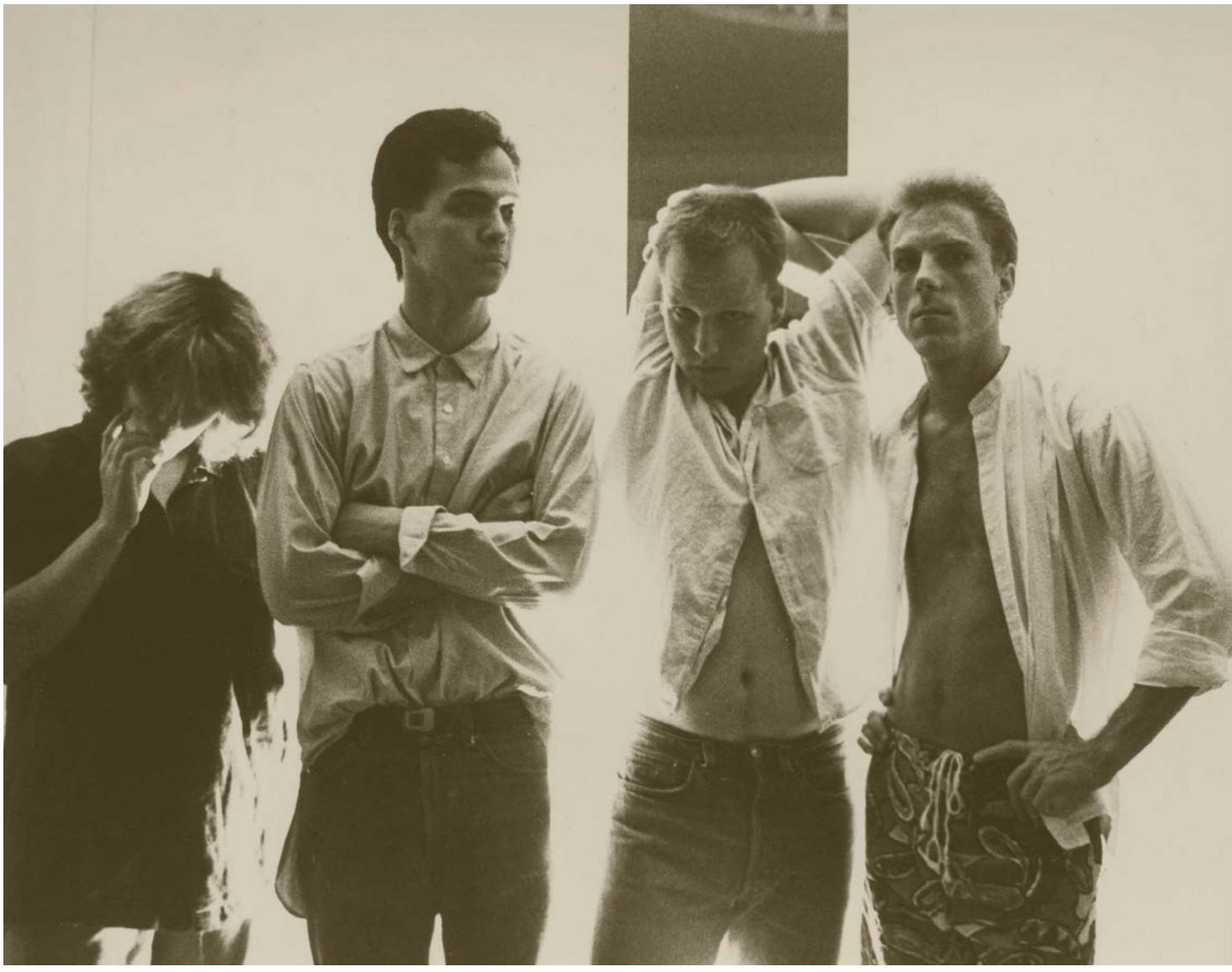
For Francis, too, setting up in opposition to the prevailing popular culture epitomised by MTV's slide towards the mainstream was vital. "It was conscious," he says. "I don't know if it became conscious when we picked up our guitars, it was more going to see bands and recognising they were either on this side of the line or that side of the line. A lot of the mainstream music seemed like it was trying to go there, it wanted success. To us, that type of mediocrity and flashy shtick, it wasn't cool. Then there was stuff on the other side of the line – cool bands, they weren't being flashy or trying to pander to some kind of audience, they were full-on 'fuck you guys'.

"There wasn't an atmosphere of appeasement, there was an atmosphere of 'Fuck. You.' Not necessarily trying to be confrontational but this is what we do, if you don't like it fuck off, I don't care. So when we picked up our guitars our absorption of that attitude that we appreciated mixed in with the fact that we were pretty rough and ready players, completely naïve but completely willing to try, to play a guitar solo even when you weren't a shredder. It all came very naturally."

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Prior to going into Q Division, the band had recorded *The Purple Tape*, a 17-song demo made in six Jolt Cola-fuelled days at Boston's Fort Apache Studio, using $1,000 borrowed from Francis' father. Eight of the songs were put out by 4AD as the mini-album *Come On Pilgrim*, with new versions of *Broken Face*, *Break My Body* and *I'm Amazed* later laid down for *Surfer Rosa*. Inside Q Division, the work was swift as the band, who'd been honing their set in a sewage-soaked Boston rehearsal room, seized their opportunity.

"It was very quick," says Santiago of the sessions. "Just because of the way we were – tick-tock, we gotta go, we don't have that much time. We were really well rehearsed, we were ready for that album. We didn't have any sort of pre-production on it. The first time I'd heard of pre-production was working with Gil Norton on [second album] *Doolittle*. We met Steve Albini at a coffee shop and that was it, we were in the next day.



"We were excited to get the Pixies on the map. We had the material ready to record, everything was written, way down the road. People were already excited about it, so it just had to get captured in an exciting sense, and Albini was a pretty damn good choice."

Santiago had initially wanted to use a Telecaster in the Pixies, but his former UMass roommate beat him to it, employing his blonde 1980s American Standard Tele and a Vox AC30 for the sessions. The lead guitarist borrowed bassist Kim Deal's 1970s Les Paul Goldtop and plugged into a Peavey Special. Deal, meanwhile, played an Aria Pro II Cardinal Series, borrowed from sister Kelley, that she has described as the "weirdest sounding bass" into a Peavey Combo 300, Gil Norton later persuading her to switch to a 1962 Fender Precision for 1989's *Doolittle*.

"I played Kim's Goldtop. I liked it because Charles had the Telecaster, which I wanted," says Santiago, who has since added several Les Pauls including a '57 Black Beauty, and a Bigsby-loaded 1965 ES-345 to his arsenal. "It was either going to be one or the other. A Les Paul is a really good complement to a Tele. If you've got the Fender, you're gonna have to have the Gibson to counteract it, unless you want to be a country act, and then you're all Tele'd out. Mick Jones and Strummer and all that good stuff...

"The Les Paul with the humbuckers and the distortion drives better, and I think it has a lot more tonal range, because you have the two tone controls and two volume knobs. You can vary the tones a lot with it – roll off the top and get a lot of different tones. You can sound like George Harrison, George Benson, Wes Montgomery, to... annoying!"

PERFECT MATCH

When quizzed about the dynamic between orthodox rhythm and rulebook-shredding lead player that has endured for more than 30 years, both Santiago and Francis describe it as natural.

"It's pretty amazing, because I always wanted to meet someone who wrote songs from outside the box," says Santiago. "I got lucky when we met at UMass. I went to UMass knowing I wanted to be in a band.

"We were pretty rough and ready players, completely naive, but completely willing to try"

© Getty Images

"We never had a moment of drama recording that record, it was always fun"

Something Against You

On *Surfer Rosa*'s release, Steve Albini was incensed by 4AD crediting him as producer and engineer on the sleeve, claiming he simply recorded the band. He was initially scathing about the album, but later reappraised his opinion significantly.

"I think there was a misunderstanding and later he felt he'd been manipulated by the record company," Francis recalls. "Apparently they had some sort of prior agreement that he was being hired as an engineer, not a producer. He probably didn't want to produce anything unless it met with his values. An outsider coming into the Pixies for the first time, you're not going to understand immediately what our values are – are these guys cool? Are they a bunch of dorks? Steve couldn't quite tell.

"We liked working with him, he had a lot of cool instincts, he definitely had a fuck-you attitude. He brought too much of that, from a social point of view. Having a coffee with him at the diner was a fucking nightmare… He'd be sitting there being fairly offensive with truck drivers and little old ladies who'd seen 10 times as much shit in their lives as he had, and there he was flying the flag of antagonisation. 'Dude, chill the fuck out, it's eight in the morning, we're just drinking coffee, we don't need to offend these people!'"

I tried in high school, but don't have the discipline to learn other people's songs. It didn't interest me, I'd rather make stuff up."

"Joey and I had a bond, the same bond we share today," says Francis. "To this day, we both still confuse each other. We might know each other really well, but I don't know if we really understand each other. We were bonding over this idea of starting a band, and you just kind of get on with it. For Joey and I, that dynamic has been there since we were 18 – it's still exactly the same. With the Pixies, we always prefer not to be confrontational with each other.

"With Kim it was the same deal – I don't know if she understood what I was about, I didn't understand what she was all about necessarily, but we shared the same passion of 'Isn't music cool? Isn't music amazing?'. That was enough to declare us – we're a band, we're playing a show on Friday night, we'll represent this idea of original music by an original band. It was a very upbeat dynamic, not weighed down by any bad blood. There wasn't any volatile chemistry, it was all good chemistry."

I'M AMAZED

Back in the groove of globe-straddling tours and festival headline shows, two albums into a comeback that has seen Paz Lenchantin take over from Deal on bass, Santiago acknowledges that while he's having the most fun he's ever had in the band, *Surfer Rosa*'s legacy remains a powerful one. It is, after all, an album that Kurt Cobain confessed to ripping off, musing, "I should have been in that band".

"It's very good," says Santiago, letting out a laconic chuckle. "It sounds timeless. There's no bullshit or gimmicks on it and it sounds like four kids doing the best they can."

"I can't really speak to the legacy of it, because it's my record," says Francis. "I'm glad it worked out and people found the record inspiring, I'm very happy about that. But even 30 years later, it's almost like I can't presume any kind of status. To me, I'm just kind of in the band, I have a gig tonight, so I'm still kind of in the same racket. While I'm very pleased the 'product' has a good shelf life, it may just be my uptight New England soul that doesn't want to get too emotional about it... I'm not saying we came from poverty, but we definitely come from a working class blue-collar ethic – just gotta do the job, we've gotta do the gig, we've gotta practise our new songs so they don't suck so much... as opposed to [adopts posh voice] 'We are the great Pixies'. We'll bask in the glow when we've played a show and the audience claps. That's our one moment to feel it."

"We never had a moment of drama recording that record, it was always fun," concludes Santiago. "We always had this fun element to it, 'Okay what's the next song? Great, let's do it'. We were pretty goofy people... Fuck it, we are goofy!

"Now there's so much to appreciate about it. We're doing what we love and it's been for so long. *Surfer Rosa*'s 30 years old and everything's just paid off from all that hard work, but in the beginning those were the times. My life was a lot simpler, but it's just great right now. You don't want to romanticise it too much, but we worked so hard for it and we're one of the lucky few who can keep doing this after all that time."

The Pixies' deluxe *Come On Pilgrim… It's Surfer Rosa* reissue package is out now on 4AD

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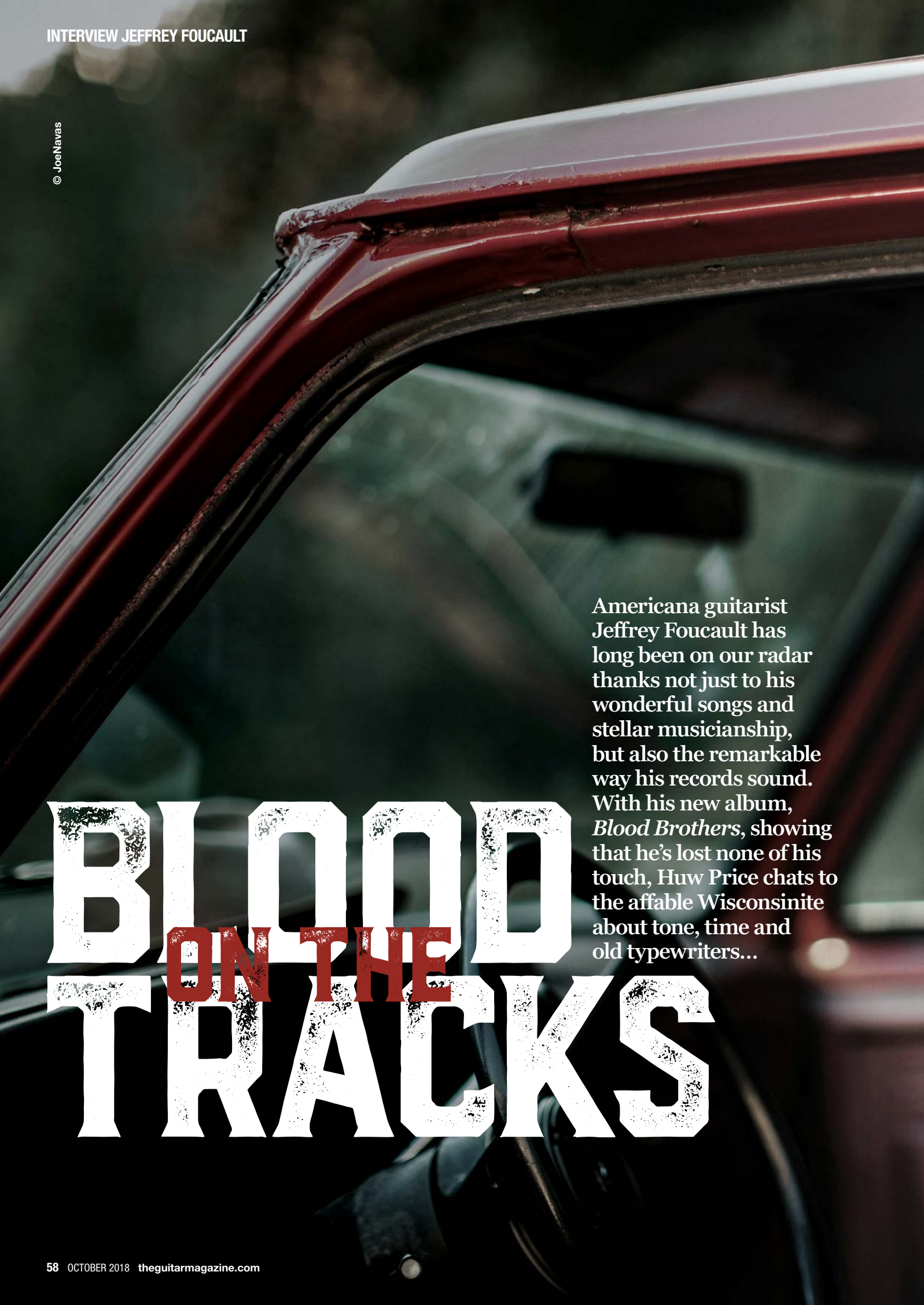

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BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

Americana guitarist Jeffrey Foucault has long been on our radar thanks not just to his wonderful songs and stellar musicianship, but also the remarkable way his records sound. With his new album, *Blood Brothers*, showing that he's lost none of his touch, Huw Price chats to the affable Wisconsinite about tone, time and old typewriters...

"I REALLY HAVE NO INTEREST IN HAVING A BAND THAT PLAYS LOUD"

Since the 2001 release of his debut *Miles From The Lightning*, Jeffrey Foucault has been carving out a critically acclaimed career as a singer, songwriter, guitarist and producer. Jeffrey first picked up guitar when he was 17 after his father showed him a few chords. He was soon figuring out how to play simple cowboy chords and James Taylor songs from the 1970s. He became obsessed; sitting up all night playing, sleeping through school the next day and spending all his time daydreaming about guitars.

Those late nights clearly weren't wasted, as Jeffrey has just shared his 11th studio album *Blood Brothers* with the world, and once again it's a joy to the ears – recorded live onto tape at Pachyderm Studios in rural Minnesota.

During his early career Foucault was more in the 'singer-songwriter' vein when it came to his guitar skills, but he's been playing a lot more in recent years – both on his records and other people's. Despite that, he's still unerringly humble and self-deprecating about his talent.

"I didn't trust my singing or my playing to any great extent, because I started late," he admits. "I never felt that I was as facile on the instrument as I wanted to be and I was already out on the road before I had the 10,000 hours needed for mastery. So initially I considered myself to be a writer foremost – basically a typewriter who also happened to play guitar.

"That satisfaction you initially get from being able to play a chord without muting anything, there's a diminishing return. Then you learn other people's song's and that's really satisfying, but then there's a diminishing return on that so you start writing your own songs. It started with the guitar but that led along to the songwriting."

PLUGGING IN

Foucault has also been known primarily as an acoustic player for much of his career, but he's begun to embrace the electric guitar, in part as he feels like his skills have improved.

"I've became a more technical player," he suggests. "I started playing bottleneck and electric guitar and now I've played a load of solos on records I've produced for other people. I played all the leads on my wife, Kris Delmhorst's, last record. I'm comfortable playing in a variety of settings and I know how to get the tones I want. I'm a serviceable guitar player, nothing flashy."

Indeed, he's so comfortable as an acoustic player now that he can't really choose between acoustic or electric any more.

"It's about 50/50," he confirms. "I bring both on the road. I have a Gibson J-45 from the 40s – it's either a '46 or '47. That's my road

acoustic and I bring one of my electrics, too. I have a few, but most recently my road electric is a Resophonic made by a company called Mule out of Michigan."

His embrace of the electric guitar has also seen Jeffrey develop a passion for amplifiers – specifically old Gibson amps from the company's golden age.

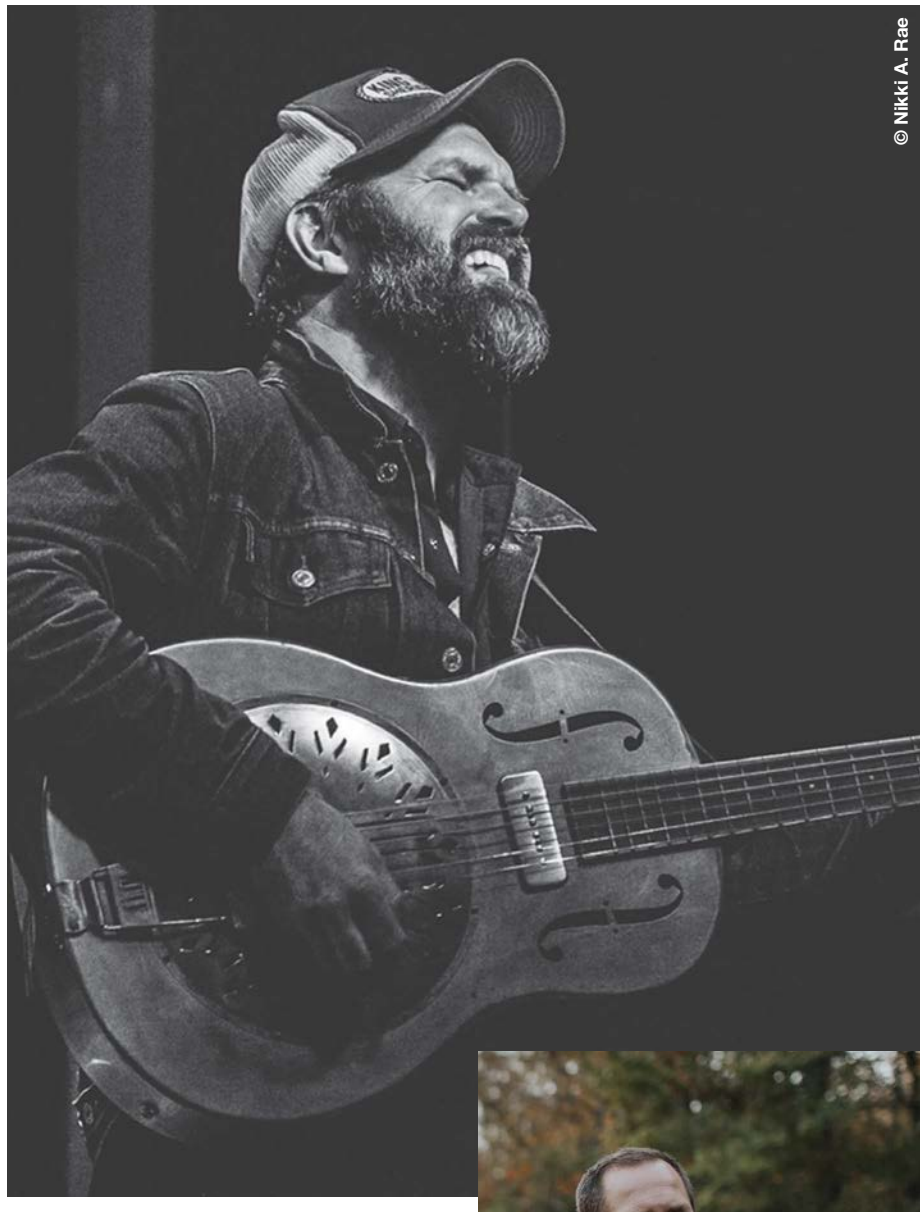
"Right now I have seven of them, so I need to get rid of a few!" he chuckles. "I particularly like the GA-8s from the 50s – they are really lightweight and I can put one in the overhead compartment of a jet or even underneath the seat in front of me.

"I specifically like the Gibson tone and I like turning a five-watt amp up to about 12 o'clock. That's the break point where it's still clean and you can play with force. For my last three records I worked with a great guitarist called Bo Ramsey and I learned it doesn't matter what's on your pedalboard. It all comes down to three things – the guitar, the person who's holding it and the amplifier.

"Every sound, with the exception of a few simple things like tremolo and reverb, you should be able to get by being who you are. If you want to work on your tone, you really should be working on your touch.

"Bo will use an early 50s Fender TV Deluxe and he has that thing running really hot, but he barely touches the guitar when he's playing. He doesn't need a pedal for overdrive because he can get that just by digging in.

"What I really like about the GA-8 is that it behaves a lot like a low-watt Fender. I can play on stage with a full band and all I have to do is put a mic on it and run it back through the monitors. It cuts down on stage volume, it's perfectly loud and balanced enough and gives you tons of low end information without being too aggressive or nasal."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KEEP IT SMALL

Given his love of cranked small amps on the road, it's no surprise that Jeffrey favours a similar approach in the studio, but again he keeps things organic, simple and raw.

"Absolutely, they're there in the room with me" he confirms. "I really have no interest in having a band that plays loud. I understand that it's viscerally impactful to hear a band play really loud, and I can get behind that. But with my band, if we show up at the main stage of a festival, we play at a reasonable volume and I don't think it distracts from the power of what we're doing to play quiet.

"A lot of the time I gig with Billy Conway. When we're a duo, our rule is you've got to be able to carry everything you're going to play into the club in one trip. Billy has a drum kit in a suitcase with a snare drum, a ride cymbal and a Low Boy [beater]. The empty suitcase is used as the bass drum."

Unsurprisingly then, Foucault doesn't have much truck with overly processed or intricate live set-ups.

"I play my acoustic with a Fishman magnetic pickup and a Rare Earth blender for the internal microphone through a DI box," he explains. "Because it's a Gibson, and because I hate the sound of DI acoustics, I put a microphone in front and blend it about 50/50 to get the natural sound of the guitar.

"There is no pickup that can really make an acoustic guitar sound like an acoustic. Whatever pickup you use, without a microphone it's still going to sound more like the guitar preset on a synthesiser."

When it comes to electrics, it's not all straight into the amp as you would expect, but nothing too fancy.

"I have an electric running through a pedalboard into my GA-8," he notes. "But at this point my pedalboard just has three Strymon pedals and one Electro-Harmonix 720 looper."

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PLAYING BY EAR

Jeffrey has been doing a fair bit of production work in recent years – and given the wonderfully organic way his records sound, it's no surprise. But what is unexpected, is that Foucault has never had any formal training in production or engineering.

"No, it's all just stuff I picked up along the way," he tells us. "I tried a lot of different studios and one of the reasons I started producing for other people was that it gave

me the opportunity to explore different engineering approaches. Like putting the whole band in one room, or just putting the drums in isolation.

"Also whether you preserve line of sight for everybody and whether you put all the amps in cupboards or try and use the room sound. All of that impacts how a record sounds and feels."

When it comes to his approach to recording, its no surprise that he tries to keep things as organic as possible.

"I like the naturalness of sound moving through the air," Jeffrey enthuses. "That's how we hear sound and yet it isn't always the way we record stuff. It's that funny relationship between the illusion of reality and the reality of illusion. There's always a sliding scale in the studio between those two things.

"If I'm going to listen to someone playing acoustic guitar, I'm not going to place my ears three inches from the soundhole or the 14th fret. And I'm not going to listen to a singer real close up.

"Of course there are things you can only do as a singer when you're close mic'd. It gives you the opportunity to create these illusions, like being able to play your guitar at a volume that people would never hear in relationship to your vocal if they were in the room with you. That can be really satisfying."

"I LIKE THE NATURALNESS OF SOUND MOVING THROUGH THE AIR"

We note that Jeffery's records often sound like they're capturing a specific and unique moment in time, and its clearly a facet of the process that he enjoys.

"That's the only way, isn't it?" he smiles. "If you're good enough musicians, and you're ready to play, you might approach it a few different ways on the fly. On one of them something cool happens and when it does, a good engineer will be rolling.

"If you want to be more painterly about it, make it a more lapidary thing by recording in sequence, there are things you can gain from that. But there are also things that you will lose and the one thing you will lose for certain is the variability that creates magic."

LIGHTEN UP

Jeffrey's records often have a dark and brooding persona about them, but *Blood Brothers* has a lightness of touch and an airy quality to it – something it that turned out in stark contrast to his mindset going into the writing process.

"The intention is always to do something different," he insists. "I would never consciously try to repeat something that has happened recently, but America has been going off the rails and has been for quite a while and I'm certainly upset enough about our politics and cultural situation that I expected the songs to be darker.

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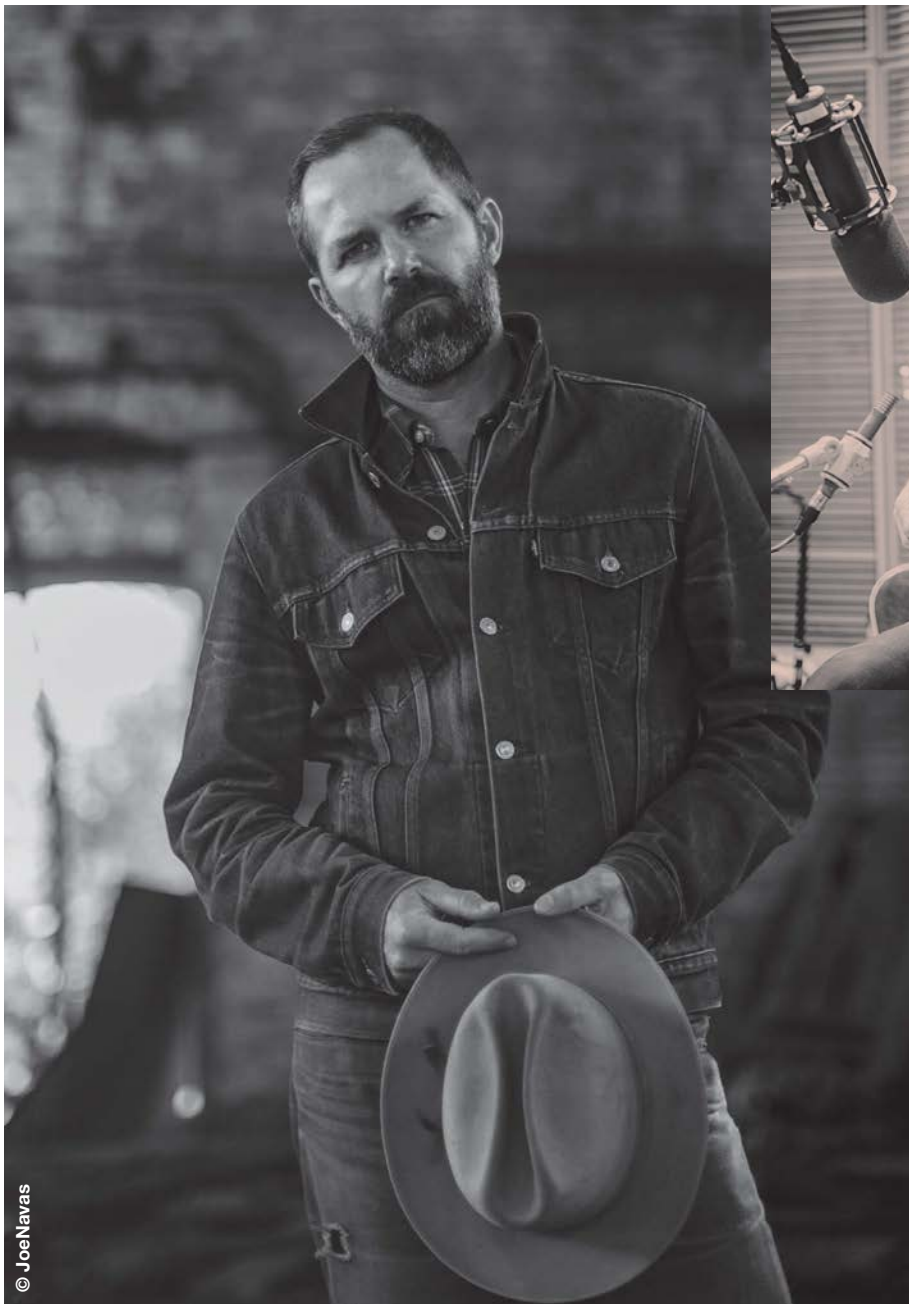

"I REALLY BELIEVE IN THE BLUES, BUT NOT AS AN HISTORICAL REENACTMENT"

"But when you sit down to write, you think you've got a notebook full of songs about different stuff, but the truth is they're always more or less about the same stuff. It's because it's just you and your brain, and you're thinking about the same shit over and over.

"That's what happened with *Blood Brothers* – because I was thinking about home, family and the relationship between love and time. I'm in my early 40s and I'm making sense of my own life, my parents' lives and my children. That's a heavy place to be, but I focused on the important stuff with more open-handedness and light.

"It's true I've made a lot of dark records and I happen to enjoy sad music. I really believe in the blues, but not as an historical reenactment. It's an existential proposition and a reaction to the pain of being alive that is uniformly felt. I love it, but that doesn't mean it's the only way to pay attention to music.

"The moment you say something as blanket as all art reacts to death or pain, or any twee post-modernist thing, you should think about 'Do wah diddy, diddy dum, diddy do'. It doesn't have anything to do with the pain of life, but it makes me feel perfectly fine. There's room for both of those things."

OLD SCHOOL VALUES

As a man who prefers to write his songs on a Smith Corona typewriter and uses an old Western Bell rotary phone, we wonder if keeping up to date with the fast-paced world modern music is much of a priority... but the answer is fairly unsurprising.

"No!" he says with a laugh. "I'm perfectly willing to be impressed and I do enjoy discovering great new records, but I can't think of that many from the last few years that blew my mind. A lot of the stuff under the umbrella of Americana all sounds the same to me.

"Culturally we've been in a sort of Western world back eddy since the late 1990s. From the dawn of recorded music until then, if you played me a record I could tell you within about two years when it was made. But after the grunge stuff, can you really tell when a record was made based on the sonics?"

And that, as it turns out, is big part of what Foucault wants to get out of his music.

"I want to make recordings that sound like they happened at a particular time and place," he enthuses. "Like a field recording, but you shouldn't know when or where it was done. Pop music used to react to itself over and over again in a cycle of alienation and invention. Whatever was on top at any moment would alienate younger people who would look for something new that could be theirs.

"Half the time I go back to the old stuff because it will still leave me with questions as opposed to answers. Little Walter's *I Hate To See You Go*, I'll never be over that record and I'm going to listen to it until I die.

"When you think of classic tones, they're only classic because we decided they are. The fact that I think a guitar should sound a particular way is really an artefact of the technology of the time. But there are still ways to make records that sound real."

Jeffrey Foucault's latest album, *Blood Brothers*, is available now on Blueblade/Tone Tree Music

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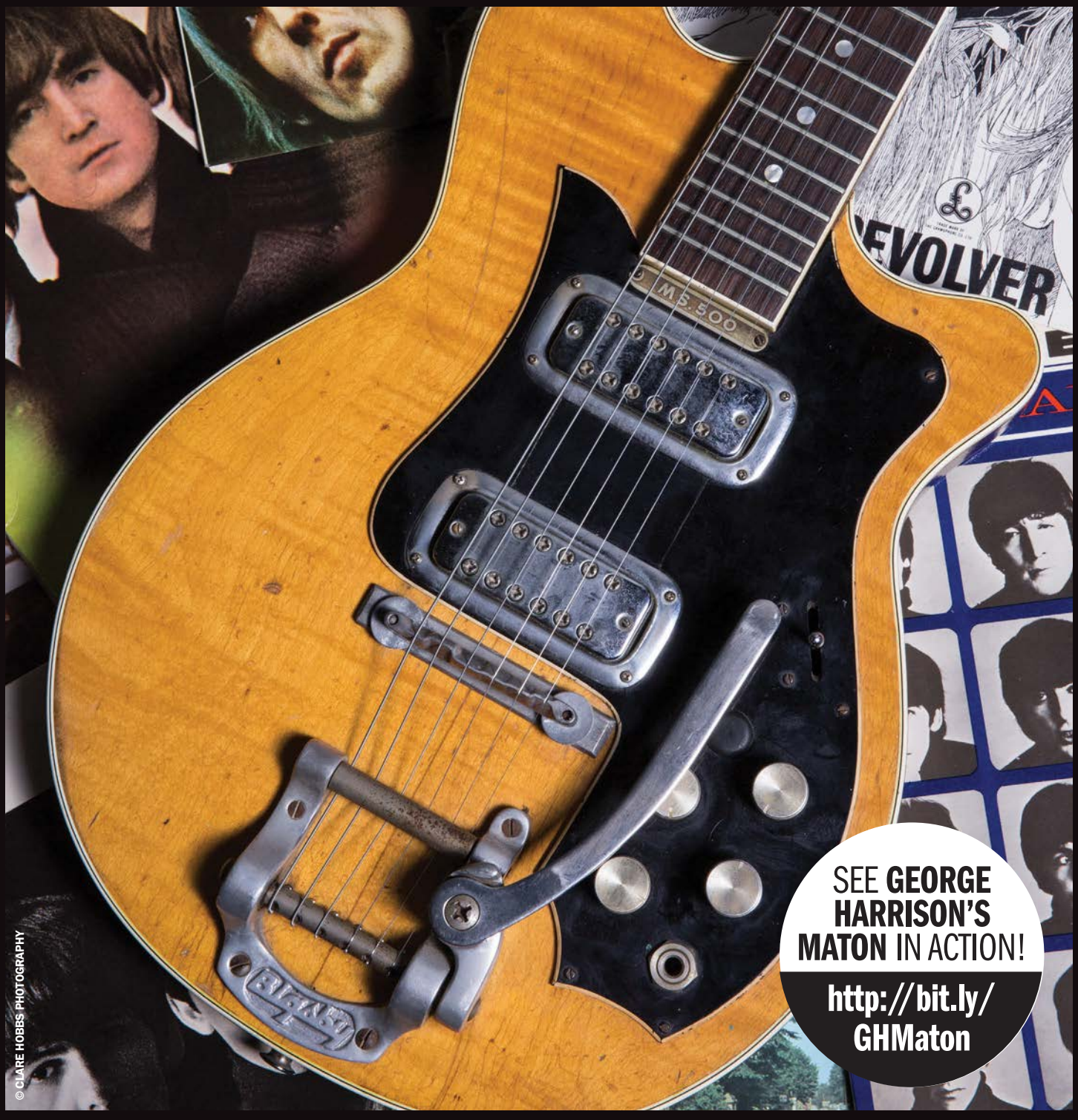

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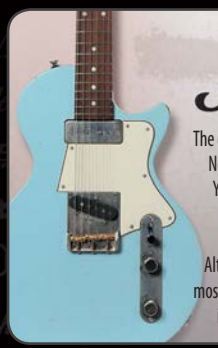

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Matt showing *TGM* how to level frets

HOW IT ALL STARTED

"When I was five I saw *Back To The Future* and from then on, I wanted to be a guitar player... and drive a pickup truck! In 2000 I was in hot pursuit of that dream at The Guitar Institute in West London. I was, however, unsupported and extremely underfunded. I owe a debt of thanks to this day to The Musician's Benevolent Fund who paid for my education and my bread with a little bit left over for a great Mexican Tele in sunburst and helped with advice on funding the rest of my London living.

"I say great – and I loved that guitar – but it was always in need of TLC and intermittently on the verge of falling apart, so I became a regular visitor to the workshops of Chandler Guitars in Kew. If West London and Surrey are the birthplaces of British blues and rock, then Chandlers was the place where all those players took their instruments for servicing and the workshop there was at the very least as good as anywhere in the country at guitar related work.

"It became a running joke that I would always ask for a job when I went there but the joke became a reality when they offered me a place in 2001. I had finished my one-year college course and though I had the offer of further music studies I didn't have any way of funding that, so I put on my learning hat and spent six months setting-up shop stock guitars and making teas and coffees. One day I was given a Baby Taylor to set-up. The customer – a chap called David Gilmour with whom you might be familiar – liked the work I'd done, and I was trusted with customers' guitars from that point on.

"It wasn't so long before the workshop manager left to start Charlie Chandler's Guitar Experience and with Charlie gone, the team sort of broke up and drifted apart leaving me as the only full-time repairer with part-time help from the legendary Brinsley Schwarz. I remember well a day one Christmas sorting out Chris Rea's pedalboard while he waited and talked football and the time when we had a load of guitars to sort out after a flood in Elvis Costello's storage facility."

GOING IT ALONE

"By 2006 I knew I had to be my own boss. 'Monty's Guitar Repairs' was born and started operations in my spare bedroom on a rickety computer desk. I started doing work for friends from bands on the same pub circuit

STRIKING A BALANCE

For many guitar players, getting your instrument in fine fettle is a process shrouded in mystery. We ask Matt if there's one factor above all others that contributes to a great guitar setup.

"Number one is balance," he affirms. "Everything must be balanced right for it to work. If the truss rod is wrong then the action measurements at the 12th are wrong, if the nut is too high then you are going to be putting more pressure on the strings than you need to so you can fret them pulling them sharp and sound nice and dissonant, if you've ever had your guitar sound in tune when you play an open D but it sounds out when you play an A – other combinations are available! – that's why.

"You also need to balance it for the player and their needs. When people get their instruments set up with us for the first time, I always make sure that they give themselves 15 to 20 minutes when they pick their guitar up to play it, so if we need to tweak it we can and then those measurement go into their file so the next time it's perfect from the off."

You too can benefit from Matt Gleeson's extensive luthiery and repair experience

MEET THE TEAM

Matt talks us through his "small team of fellow tinkerers"…

"Tim Hughes (aka 'Tonty') has a history as touring tech and still does the occasional trip out for special friends. Here he does all manner of set-up and repair work. Apart from me, he's here the most.

"John J Presley (aka 'Jonty') is a pro player who looks mean, moody and magnificent in his videos and is a joy in real life. He helps with pickup-winding, pedal-making and is at his happiest when surrounded by amps that need fixing.

"Paul McCaffrey (aka 'Ponty') is a friend of the firm. He's borrowed guitars loaded with prototype pickups and given valuable and informed feedback. People have bought pickups from us based on what they have heard on his YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/fendermac).

"Gelert (aka 'Gonty') is a regular helper, warming presence and friend of Monty's.

"April (aka 'Aonty', it helps if you say it in an Italian accent) is the empress of paperwork and helps me source the weird, wonderful things that we use."

as me and customers who followed me from Chandlers. Guitar repairers/luthiers are kind of like hairdressers, you find one you like, and you stay with them.

"In 2010 my first child was born, and it was the kick up the whatsit I need to take things more seriously and go all-in on Monty's. I sold my motorbike, which funded the start of the pickup side of the business. I locked myself away in a garage and figured out how to make them. I've been on my own for most of the journey with friends and family dipping in every now and then when I needed help.

"In the last 18-24 months my small team of fellow tinkerers has grown naturally and smoothly and now I am really lucky to have five lovely humans working with me. We can do everything and anything from restringing to custom guitars, amp repairs, pedalboards. To be honest anything to do with guitar. It's my home, where I started, and where I have had the opportunity to get my hands on an impressive amount of drool-worthy, guitar-related stuff."

TRAINING DAYS

"I have trained up quite a few people now and it has always seemed to me that passing on knowledge is one of the most important parts of this business, plus it's a bit of a selfish thing, too, as I love to see people when they learn something for the first time. Yes, you can learn a lot from YouTube et cetera, and I do myself for various things, but there are some aspects that don't translate well.

"There are two types of tuition I offer. The most popular are the group sessions. There are only three in a class, we cover getting the perfect setup. People can bring their own guitars in and we go through fret dressing to get the neck true and get rid of all the lumps and bumps. That gives us the best foundation to set the guitar up. Sort the truss rod, nut height, action and intonation. Plus, all the little things that go along with it, general electronics check, proper restring and fretboard maintenance even getting the fret ends. The cost is £350 for the day.

"I also offer one-on-one tuition for people that would like to focus on something specific. Refretting, gluing techniques, putting a partscaster together. Whatever you'd like to cover really."

For more information about Monty's Guitars, visit www.montysguitars.com

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Dave Friedman
The legendary hands of
Grover Jackson
VINTAGE-T
by Dave Friedman & Grover Jackson
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th•mann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

FRIEDMAN
VINTAGE-T & VINTAGE-S

After taking the amplifier world by storm, Dave Friedman has applied his 'secret sauce' to a range of electric guitars. Chris Vinnicombe takes a pair of familiar-but-different solidbodies for a spin...

Friedman guitars come with considerable pedigree. First there's the name that graces their two-tone headstocks: that of Dave Friedman – acclaimed amp-builder and modifier to the stars with over a quarter of a century's worth of experience. As it turns out, Friedman isn't just an amp guy – he knows an awful lot about guitars, too, and has been consulting for and advising guitar manufacturers in a behind-the-scenes capacity for years.

Also on board at Friedman's guitar operation is Grover Jackson – he of Jackson/Charvel fame and one of the key figures in the SoCal hotrod guitar scene of the late 1970s and 1980s. Jackson's role in the manufacture of Friedman guitars is very much hands-on, with the legendary guitar-maker getting involved as early in the process as timber selection.

At present, the Friedman guitar range comprises four models: the Cali harks back to San Dimas with humbuckers and a Floyd Rose residing in a hotrod S-type chassis, while the Metro-D is a set-neck single-cut that's very much a modern interpretation of the Les Paul Standard. Our review guitars represent the other half of the range and comprise the Vintage-T and Vintage-S models.

FRIEDMAN ISN'T JUST AN AMP GUY – HE'S BEEN ADVISING GUITAR MANUFACTURERS BEHIND THE SCENES FOR YEARS

There are no prizes for guessing which is which. However, rather than simply being cool-looking partscasters with paint-jobs that look like they've been slung in the back of a pickup truck after the show every night for the past few decades, Friedman and Jackson's combined experience means that the key differences are in the details.

Anyone who has toured extensively with a bolt-on electric will tell you that over time, necks can shift in their pockets and cause string alignment problems, while changes in temperature and humidity can mean that frequent truss-rod tweaks are required. Friedman addresses the

KEY FEATURES

Friedman Vintage-T

- **PRICE** £2,299 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body, bolt-on maple neck with 'Classic Vintage Taper' profile, 10-14" compound radius pau ferro fingerboard with 22 Jescar 47095 frets. Bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Hardtail bridge and vintage-style machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Friedman Classic 90 pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone (CTS pots, Orange Drop capacitors), three-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.0mm at nut, 52.3mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.3mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.1mm at nut, 52.6mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.0lb/3.6kg
- **FINISH** Metallic Blue aged nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT boutiqueamps distribution.com friedmanamplification.com**

former with its Zero-Shift Neck Pins – effectively a pair of steel dowel pins inserted into the neck pocket that eliminate shift and help keep things nice and tight. Meanwhile, body-end truss rod wheels mean that you won't have to pop the neck off to make any relief adjustments should they be required on the road.

Both guitars benefit from a Plek setup and feature a compound 10 to 14-inch fingerboard radius – one of Grover Jackson's calling cards. Side-mounted Electrosocket jack cups are another easy-to-maintain feature common to both Vintage-S and T. Meanwhile, the Vintage-T features strap buttons with a 3mm larger diameter than the vintage-style units worn by its sibling – presumably to help keep this workhorse plank strapped on when you throw it around in the way that its makers surely intended.

The addition of a two-point vibrato bridge sees the Vintage-S equipped with locking tuners, while the hardtail T model's machineheads are simple, vintage-style affairs. Both of our review guitars feel road-ready and dependable straight out of the case and the Vintage-T in particular feels like it could fall off a cliff, bounce most of the way down and still land in-tune.

We like the distressed paint-jobs a lot: the dings and abrasions are nicely random and not templated, while the fine, intricate checking lines are not overcooked. Neither is the simulated fingerboard wear on the slab maple board that features on the Vintage-S.

WE LIKE THE DISTRESSED PAINT-JOBS A LOT: THE DINGS AND ABRASIONS ARE NICELY RANDOM AND NOT TEMPLATED

Its Vintage White finish has a slightly minty hue and could almost pass for a very faded Sonic Blue, while the Vintage-T's 'Metallic Blue' is very close to Ice Blue Metallic. Time to warm up a couple of amplifiers…

IN USE

We've observed before that very good guitars simply get out of the way and let you concentrate on the important matter at hand – these are no exception and both instruments feel reassuringly familiar and immensely playable. Around the back of each guitar's substantial, vintage-tapered neck, the finish has been removed almost all the way up to the 15th fret to give a bare wood feel, while the fingerboard edges and fret ends have been lightly rolled.

If we're splitting hairs, the backs of both necks could perhaps have benefited from one more pass with Micro-Mesh or a similarly fine abrasive just to make them a fraction smoother to the touch, but it's a highly subjective area. Given their hot-rod roots, it's perhaps fitting that the necks of both guitars feel more like they've been sanded back and then played to death, rather than simply emulating vintage gloss that's been worn away.

Compared to our Fender Custom Shop reference Strat – an ash-bodied '56-style relic – in the single-coil positions, the Friedman is a little louder with deeper bass, and where the Fender offers slightly more dynamic range and a more

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1967 Gibson ES-335 TD
1968 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1956 Gibson ES-225 TDN Blonde
1959 Gibson ES-175D Players

1964 Gibson ES-330 TDC
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

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1956 Fender Stratocaster totally MINT
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White (2 off!)
1963 Fender Stratocaster body refin
1965 Fender Stratocaster Lake Placid Blue
1965 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1969 Fender Stratocaster maple cap s/b
1970 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB

1953 Fender Esquire
1956 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster body refin
1965 Fender Telecaster Blonde
1965 Fender Custom Telecaster Shoreline Gold..!
1968 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline

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1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

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1956 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
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1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1970 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1973 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop
1954 Gibson Les Paul Junior + amp
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1960 Gibson Les Paul Junior

1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1961 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Polaris White
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1962 Gibson SG Special
1965 Gibson SG Junior Polaris White

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KEY FEATURES

Friedman Vintage-S

- **PRICE** £2,599 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 'Classic Vintage Taper' profile, 10-14" compound radius slab maple fingerboard with 22 Jescar 47095 frets. Bone nut
- **HARDWARE** 2-point vibrato bridge with bent steel saddles, locking vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Friedman Classic+ humbucker (bridge), Classic Single Coil RWRP (middle) and Classic Single Coil (neck). 1x volume, 1x tone (CTS pots, Orange Drop capacitors), 5-way blade selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.9mm at nut, 51.9mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 53.6mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.6lb/3.4kg
- **FINISH** Vintage White aged nitrocellulose

percussive response, the Friedman is rounder and smoother but no less harmonically complex.

The presence of a reverse-wound, reverse-polarity middle pickup means that positions two and four on the Vintage-S are hum-cancelling. Bridge humbuckers in S-type guitars can leave us a little cold as they are often neither fish nor foul but this hotter-than-vintage Classic+ unit impresses, whether you are shooting for EVH or rootsier, older flavours.

The Vintage-T – aided by a little LP Special character thanks to its mahogany body and P-90 pickups – is thicker, fatter and greasier, but still hangs on to some of the T-style identity inherent in its body outline and bolt-on neck. It's a more muscular version thereof, although the excellent balance and sustain means that there's plenty to love during mellower moments, too, regardless of where the three-way toggle sits.

IT'S TOUGH TO THINK OF A BETTER, OR MORE BULLET-PROOF, BLUE-COLLAR GUITAR THAN THE VINTAGE-T

Happily, what you don't get are the overly nasal results that can sometimes occur when you pair P-90s with an ash or alder T-style body. The guitar has inherited fatness from the genetic influence of Kalamazoo, but the 50s-style Gibson wiring delivers a broad range of tones thanks to varying degrees of pickup blend, and volume controls that roll-off without too much treble loss.

If you play alt-country, alternative rock, punk rock or power pop then it's tough to think of a better (or more bullet-proof) blue-collar guitar than the Vintage-T with which to take care of business as the years of sweat and toil on the road roll by. If your tastes lean a little further towards hard-rock, fusion and funk – or you just need a super-versatile whammy-equipped guitar with a vintage look for a function band – the Vintage-S has you covered, and then some.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Designed in collaboration with John Mayer, the **PRS Silver Sky** (£2,299) takes Leo's blueprint and reimagines it for the modern pro, but you'll have to add your own road wear. **Xotic's California Classic XSC-2** (£2,999) has a similar aesthetic to the Vintage-S and includes a stunning roasted flame maple neck. **Fano's Standard TC6** (£1,989) is a distressed T-type loaded with Super'Tron-style pickups. An affordable **Fender** with a P-90 twist, the **Modern Player Telecaster Thinline Deluxe** can be found for under £400…

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ High-quality aged finishes
+ Excellent-sounding pickups
+ Built to survive the road

– The bare-wood feel of the necks might not be for everyone

A pair of professional workhorses with thoroughbred DNA, these easy-playing hotrods will appeal to hard-rockers and vintage fans alike

9/10

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JACKSON X SERIES MARTY FRIEDMAN MF-1

Former Megadeth man Marty Friedman needs a guitar that's built to shred, and this affordable Jackson seems to fit the bill. Darran Charles straps in and gets ready to rock...

Such is Marty Friedman's synonymity with Jackson guitars, many casual observers would probably be surprised to learn that he there was a time when he wasn't playing them, but the former Megadeth man and all-round shred titan did spend three years with PRS before returning home in 2017.

"When I came off the *Inferno* [his last solo album] tour Jackson had big plans that they wanted to include me in," Friedman explains when asked why he came back to the brand. "And after many talks with the people there, I felt I could make a bigger creative contribution to Jackson than I could with PRS". And with that, the prodigal son returned with a brand new signature model.

His time with PRS clearly had an effect on Marty, however. His previous Jackson signature, the Kelly, was a Explorer-inspired design, but after a few years playing a Singlecut, he's opted to make the similarly vibed Monarkh body shape the basis for his latest squeeze.

"I've discovered that a Les Paul-style shape, while looking rather normal and plain when in its case, looks fantastic on just about anyone," Marty explains of the MF-1's single-cut shape. "You can't take a bad picture with it!"

HANDS ON

There's just one finish available on the MF-1, and it's an appropriately glossy black – but with striking white bevelled edges that add an almost playful air to what might have otherwise been a very sinister looking guitar. The body is constructed of nato – a wood that has similar tonal properties to mahogany – with a set-neck sporting a rosewood board and bound edges. Slimmer than a Les Paul with a body depth of 46.7mm, the rear of the lower horn has also been extensively carved to allow unrestricted upper-fret access.

The black gloss finish extends to the back of the neck, which is a comfortable, familiar-feeling C shape. At the other end, the three-per-side AT-1 headstock is constructed so that the strings run perfectly straight through the nut into their respective locking tuners, providing maximum tuning stability – a definite advantage for an artist known for his expressive bending work and tone-wide vibrato.

It's a weighty beast but it's a weight comfortably distributed when strapped on, and this reviewer never experienced any shoulder fatigue during use. The white bevelled edges, although likely only present for aesthetic reasons, provide a comfortable surface on which to rest your forearm, contrary to the forearm burden sometimes provided by the lip of carved-top guitars of this shape.

> A SINGLE-CUT LOADED WITH EMGS IS NEVER GOING TO BE A SHRINKING VIOLET IN THE GAIN DEPARTMENT

The 12-inch radius of the fretboard insures against fretting out while still producing a comfortable enough curvature for chordal work. Despite the high-gloss finish to the back of the neck, it's a slick surface for the thumb, and quick navigation up and down the neck produced little in the way of friction.

SOUNDS

A black single-cut loaded with EMGs (albeit passive ones) is never going to be a shrinking violet in the gain department, but when played through a Bogner-style patch

KEY FEATURES

Jackson X Series Marty Friedman MF-1

- **PRICE** £519
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Nato with 3/4" maple top, 1-piece mahogany set-neck with graphite reinforcement and scarf joint. 12" radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 jumbo frets, pearloid block inlays
- **HARDWARE** Jackson TOM-style adjustable bridge with anchored tailpiece, 3x3 die-cast locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** EMG Marty Friedman signature neck and bridge pickups; 2x volume and 2x tone dome-style controls, 3-way toggle switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75" (628mm)
- **NECK DEPTH** 19.4mm at 1st fret; 21.2mm at 12th fret
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8 mm at nut; 53.2 mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 52.6mm at bridge; 34.9mm at nut
- **WEIGHT** 4.1kg/9lb
- **FINISH** Black with white bevels only
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 0845 305 1122 **www.jacksonguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **ESP LTD EC-401** (**£649**) with its black aesthetic and active EMGs has been designed with the modern metal player in mind, whereas The **PRS SE 245** (**£475**) is still the go-to single-cut for hard-rockers on a budget

through our Axe-Fx III, we find more of charismatic but powerful heavy rock than the gain-laiden metal we were expecting. Most notably, the pick attack is round and dare we say 'tuneful'. This pick attack doesn't dominate the sonic landscape, however, even when attacking the strings with speed and gusto. It's unusual for the harmonic produced by the pick at the point of impact not to have a greater influence on the sound, and it's to Jackson's credit that it doesn't.

With its none-more-metal looks, you'd be forgiven for not expecting much versatility in the clean department, but running the MF-1 through a Twin Reverb patch soon proves that assumption wrong. The full-bodied clean tone you would expect from humbuckers is all present and correct, and indeed the extra power provides wonderful clarity for arpeggiated chords. Even more surprisingly, digging in for lead lines produces a dynamic response not entirely dissimilar to the neck pickup of a Strat. EMG pickups often get a bad rap for their perceived lifeless clean tones, but they can prove to be quite dynamic if you know how to set your amp up to suit them.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PLAY LIKE MARTY FRIEDMAN TO ENJOY THIS GUITAR. THIS IS A TRUE METAL WORKHORSE

While Friedman is famed for having a particularly unorthodox playing technique, you don't have to play like him to enjoy this guitar. This is a true metal workhorse.

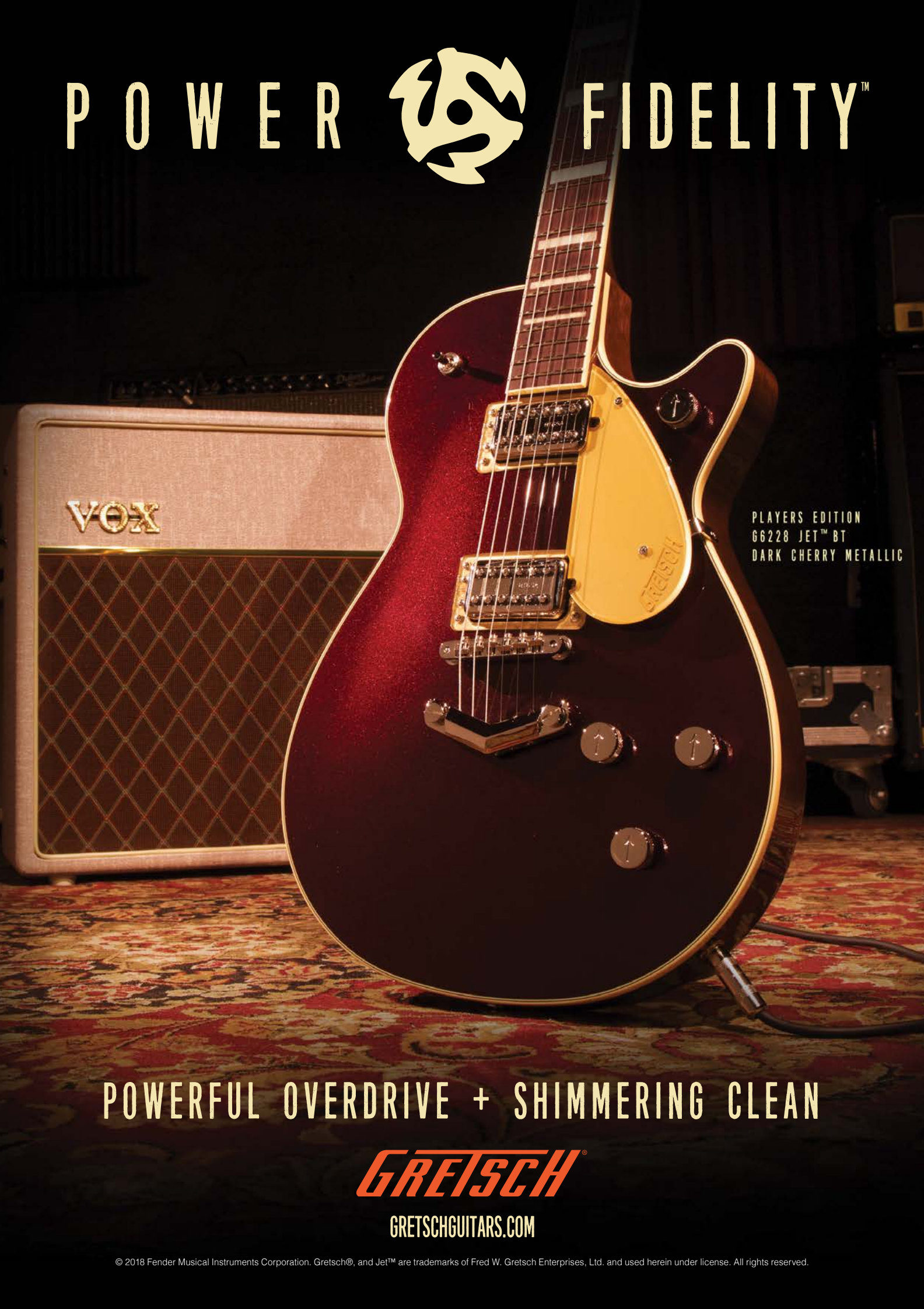
What really makes this guitar stand out in a crowded market, however, are Friedman's signature EMG pickups, and it's great to see such high-end units still included on this Indonesian-made model. Their tight and punchy delivery of rhythm work, while still producing the necessary output for soaring lead, is a difficult balance to achieve without the sound being too squashed or too uncontrollable, and this has led to the production of a guitar that can easily cope with any style of hard rock or metal that you throw at it.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ A reliable and good value workhorse for metal players
+ The EMG pickups are a welcome and great sounding bonus on a guitar at this price-point
– The black and white finish won't be to everyone's taste
– Sounds won't work for much outside of the rock and metal arena

A solid and dependable sidearm that will suit players of metal or any flavour of hard rock

8/10



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MARTY FLIES

Marty Friedman tells us about the development of his new Jackson signature model, pickups and more...

Your new Jackson signature guitar is very different to your last one – how did you go about developing it? Did you go to Jackson with a very specific design from the outset, or was it a gradual process of trial and error?
"People know me from my signature Kelly, and as much as that was an iconic guitar, I am not the type to get nostalgic and try to do something I've already done before. So, my main objective was to have Jackson do something equally as cool, but new. Not to compete with the Kelly, but to be a different animal altogether. At the same time, we wanted to improve on the Kelly wherever possible."

You've been playing guitar for a long time now. What things have you discovered are important to you in a guitar's design?
"That a guitar is also an accessory. Think about it: you take hundreds, if not thousands of pictures with it every year, so you want it to be something that looks good on your particular body and playing posture. Some guitars look absolutely amazing in the case, but when you stand with it, it just looks weird; or stands out in an awkward way; or doesn't complement the curves and lines of your body. I used to have a Dean ML, and I looked like an absolute dork when I had it on. But Dime always looked amazing with them. Different things work for different people."

The MF-1 also features your new signature EMG pickups – how do they differ from other EMG pickups?
"Being passive is a must. Battery-operated things, especially pickups, can have sweet spots in regards to how much power is left in the battery. I want to be in the sweet spot all the time. I went back and forth with EMG to develop the ultimate passive pickup: one that can match that great EMG active heavy sound and have really human sounding warmth as well. I used the prototypes for this pickup all over my *Wall Of Sound* album. It was the ultimate testing ground. I absolutely love these pickups; they give the MF-1 a warmth that I was missing with the Kelly."

You've often describe guitars as 'tools' – do they really not hold any more romantic value for you?
"The guitar itself never, ever is what inspires me. Of course, when you like the sound, the touch and the consistent tuning of a guitar, it is much more of a joy to play than a guitar that doesn't give you those things; but I firmly believe the guitar is nothing but a work tool. It's a vehicle to get whatever music I am making out of me, and deliver it to whoever is listening. For that reason, I want a reliable vehicle and I'd like to arrive in style, too. Like a Benz, it's not the most expensive vehicle out there, but it's solid as a rock, and makes the owner look great. Some of the crazy-expensive sports cars are so ultra-cool that they take the focus off the driver and put the focus on the car itself. They tend to need a lot of repairs too: those are qualities I wouldn't want in a guitar."

> "I FIRMLY BELIEVE THE GUITAR IS NOTHING BUT A WORK TOOL. IT'S A VEHICLE TO GET WHATEVER MUSIC I'M MAKING OUT OF ME"

Do you experiment with different guitars in the studio when recording an album?
"I don't like to, but I do experiment when I'm not getting magic. Sometimes the guitar you least expect to be great, sits in the track so nicely you get magic. Still, if a guitar keeps a good tune and sounds awesome, I'll just go with that because I truly hate noodling around trying to find a sound.

"When I'm in the studio I'm so focused on the music I'm making, that doing anything other than actually performing the music is a nuisance. If you start out with a great workhorse instrument, you don't need to waste too much time experimenting."

Do you think players can be too focused on gear at the expense of exploring their craft?
"Some people are really suited to tweaking gear, doing it smartly and getting great results. I admire those people, but I don't have that in me. But I will play the same phrase 100 times with different fingerings, timings, tweaking the most subtle nuances and accents of the phrase until I get the magic. I put all of my energy into the music itself and the way I interpret it. I try to surround myself with great techs and engineers to twist he knobs until it's sonically good. Those people must be focused on gear.

"There are some greats out there who honestly love tweaking gear and are making fantastic music too – Devin Townsend is one of these anomalies. However, I do fear that in the amateur world there may be a lot of people who are constantly talking about gear, comparing gear, praising and badmouthing gear, to the extent that it saps them of precious energy that might be better spent on the actual music they intend on making."

From the mind of Ryan Adams comes a new guitar utility with more tricks up its sleeve than a 1980s supervillain. The DEFCON4 works as a preamp and EQ to meticulously craft your guitar's sound. Bring peace time to your tone and avoid tedious amp tweaking during a set by using the DEFCON4 to easily switch from single coil to humbucking instruments with a quick twist of the rotary knobs. When the Launch switch is engaged, go into DEFCON 1 and activate a searing boost for your guitar.

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TAYLOR 614CE & 614CE BUILDER'S EDITION

Taylor's revolutionary V-Class bracing makes the jump to its 600 series in the shape of two 614ce Grand Auditorium models. Michael Watts finds out if V-Class is permanent...

KEY FEATURES

Taylor 614ce Builder's Edition

- **PRICE** £4,199
- **DESCRIPTION** Grand Auditorium cutaway electro-acoustic. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Flamed maple back and sides w/ torrefied, V-Class braced Sitka spruce top and rock maple neck. Beveled body edges
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh 510 tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Taylor ES2 active pickup system
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH**: 20mm at 1st fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.8lb/2.1kg
- **FINISH** Wild Honey Burst Silent Satin
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**

Taylor Guitars is no longer the young upstart that shot to prominence seemingly out of nowhere in the late 1970s. Never strangers to controversy in the quest to build the finest instrument possible (remember when people balked at the company's bolt-on NT neck joint?) Taylor's new V-Class bracing has led to much pearl clutching among the more conservative members of the acoustic guitar community. We welcome any move that makes for a more responsive and inspiring musical instrument and have been looking forward to seeing more examples of this bracing system as it filters through the Taylor range.

Here we have two versions of Taylor's long-established 614ce Grand Auditorium model. The 614ce has traditionally found most favour as a stage instrument (and both of these guitars come with Taylor's ES2 active pickup system) but with a more open sonic palette afforded by the new V-Class bracing system, there's every reason to expect excellent acoustic performance, too.

Back in the day, Taylor 600 series guitars would often feature quilted maple. In this case however, we have two beautiful examples of the denser, flamed variant under a dark stain. Bob Taylor's heir apparent Andy Powers has been very vocal about his love for this great tonewood and its historic role in the creation of superlative instruments. Maple has long been a wood that divides opinion and it's true that if you approach it with the same thicknessing and voicing measurements as rosewood or mahogany the results will be unlikely to unlock the timber's full potential. However, when its more latent characteristics are unleashed the wood is capable of providing a huge dynamic and sonic range, proving as inspiring for the singer/songwriter as it is for the solo fingerstyle player.

Incidentally, both these guitars feature torrefied Sitka Spruce tops, an increasingly popular approach which uses heat treatment to dry out the wood, often lending a smoother, more mature timbre to the instrument.

THE BUILDER'S EDITION 614CE FEATURES ROUNDED EDGES AND BEVELS FOR THE FOREARM AND CUTAWAY

HANDS ON

Of the two guitars, the original 614ce looks more immediately familiar with tasteful ebony bindings, ivoroid purfling and headstock and fretboard inlays, an abalone rosette ring and a Macassar ebony scratchplate. The satin finished neck feels fast and engaging, with the 1.75-inch nut width leaving ample space for accurate fingering. It's a little neck-heavy but feels reasonably balanced when played seated. On a strap it's not an issue.

Looking more like a sole luthier-built instrument than a production guitar, the Builder's Edition of the 614ce features rounded edges and bevels for the forearm and cutaway reminiscent of the work of luthiers such as Kevin Ryan or Bill Tippin.

This ergonomic approach makes the guitar's 16-inch lower bout immediately more approachable, certainly for the forearm. The cutaway bevel, while visually attractive and well executed, makes less practical difference as access to the very top frets is still a stretch due to the depth of the heel.

THE NEW
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MUSIC MAN

While this guitar feels very comfortable against the body, the weight of the rock maple neck and Gotoh tuners combined with the rounded edges and Silent Satin finish can sometimes make it challenging to keep in place for the seated player. Again, this is not an issue when played standing.

IN USE

Sitting down with the regular 614ce, it's immediately apparent that Taylor's V-Class bracing adds stiffness along the centre of the top. In effect this controls the long dipole (the vibrations along the length of the soundboard) while the routed braces (with only the upper and lower transverse braces meeting the kerfing of the guitar) open up cross dipole movement leading to an increase in bass response and a more immediate attack. The human ear interprets most of the character of a sound from the attack itself and this increased responsiveness and immediacy gives a sense of clarity and presence to both player and listener.

From the point of view of timbre this guitar has everything you'd expect from a Taylor. Shimmering highs (smoothed off no doubt by the torrefied top), scooped mids and a workable, but never overpowering bass end. It's an updated, more sophisticated version of the classic maple Taylor sound. Open tunings sound detailed and rich and there is good balance along the whole fretboard. As you'd expect, playability and intonation are excellent throughout.

The Builder's Edition is, of course, a more refined take on the theme. Bevels can often affect the bass response of an instrument but despite the reduced surface area of the top, this still has an open voice, which comes into its own in altered tunings. There's no scratchplate, suggesting that the guitar is aimed more at the fingerstyle player than the plectrum enthusiast. Nevertheless, there is headroom to spare when you dig in with a pick.

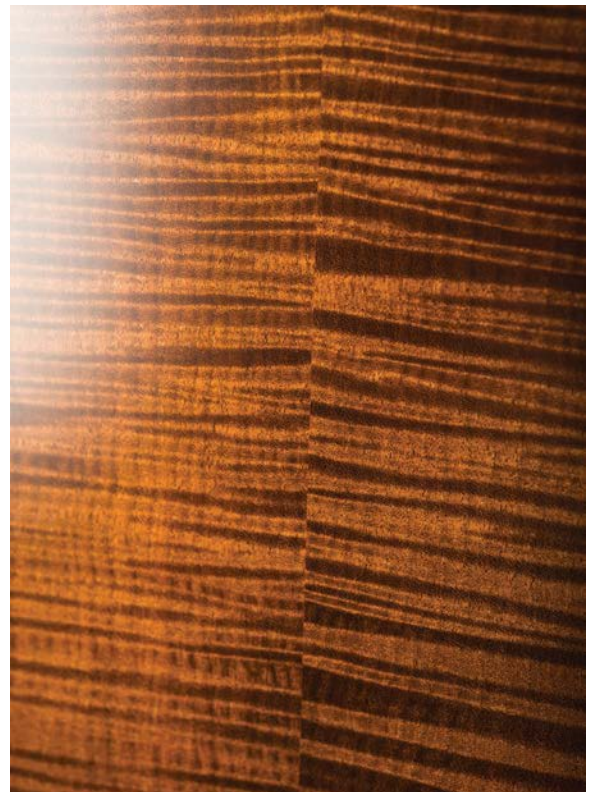
Particularly worthy of note is the Silent Satin UV finish in this case in Taylor's Wild Honey Burst stain. Those of us who have used satin-finished guitars in the studio will have learned all manner of manoeuvres to prevent body squeaks and rubbing sounds while recording. In this case unwanted noise is all but eliminated.

Plugged in, both instruments sound very natural, the ES2 active pickup being a massive improvement

KEY FEATURES

Taylor 614ce

- **PRICE** £4,019
- **DESCRIPTION** Grand Auditorium cutaway electro-acoustic. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Flamed maple back and sides w/ torrefied, V-Class braced Sitka spruce top and tropical mahogany neck
- **HARDWARE** Taylor branded enclosed nickel tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Taylor ES2 active pickup system
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH**: 21mm at 1st fret, 21.5mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.5mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.6lb/2.0kg
- **FINISH** Gloss body, satin neck



LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

At this price-point the main competition comes from **Martin**'s OM series, either the **OM-28** (**£2,899**) or **OM-18** (**£2,699**). If maple is your thing and you can stretch the budget then the **Collings SJ** (**£4,925**) in maple should be on your radar. For an ergonomic fingerstyle guitar, look no further than the **Lowden F35c** (**£4,830**), and if you're after a bevel for less of an outlay check out the **Avian Songbird** (**£1,239**)

upon the piezo systems in earlier iterations of the 614ce. Going through a dedicated acoustic amp both guitars sound full and powerful and when recorded directly to the desk the results are impressive. The slightly scooped midrange also makes both instruments ideal candidates for supporting vocals.

Taylor guitars are famed for their impeccable finish, playability and clear tone. These two versions of the 614ce model will exceed the standards demanded by guitar buyers even at this not inconsiderable price-point, and also demonstrate that this pioneering brand remains determined to challenge conventions in guitar building.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Taylor 614ce

+ Excellent build quality
+ Beautiful woods
+ Great acoustic and plugged in sounds

– Some players will need a fuller bass response
– We remember when gold tuners came as standard on the 614ce

The stage guitar of choice for many professional musicians, this new version of the 614ce proves that there are few instruments out there to match this level of electro-acoustic performance

9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Taylor 614ce Builder's Edition

+ Very comfortable
+ Excellent in open tunings
+ Superb plugged in tones

– While comfortable, the rounded body edges do take some getting used to
– Slightly neck heavy

An elegant take on the 614ce concept that borrows from the Taylor back catalogue as much as from the original design. While the features suggest a gentle fingerstyle guitar, this will growl when pushed

8/10

Marshall

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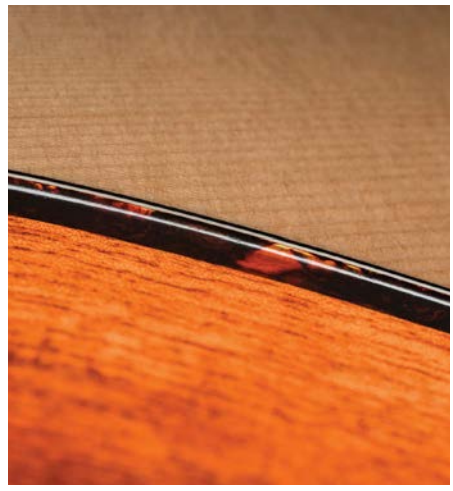

EASTMAN **E1D**

New for 2018, Eastman's E1D is a no-nonsense, all-solid dreadnought that's ideal for that tricky 'first upgrade' acoustic purchase. James Stevens investigates...

Eastman Guitars might have begun life in 1992 building violins, but if you've picked up a copy of this magazine in the last few years, you'll be well aware that the US company has made serious inroads into the guitar world, offering undeniably cool instruments of a quality and tone that far outstrips their price points.

A big part of this bang for buck equation is their Chinese build – something that still has a certain stigma for some, but Eastman has long dispelled this in our eyes. All of Eastman's guitars are hand-made by luthiers, they just happen to be in Beijing – that's why they cost more than your average Asian-made guitar, but also why the quality is so impressive.

Eastman's acoustic range is split in two. The AC guitars are mid-size cutaways loaded with either Fishman or LR Baggs electronics, while the Traditional series is (as you would expect) full-bodied acoustics in standard body shapes; dreadnought, jumbo, OM and the like.

New for 2018 is the E1D from the Traditional series, which is an all-solid dreadnought. If you're in the market for a new acoustic with £500 to spend, you're likely going to go down one of two roads. You can either have an electro-acoustic that features a laminate or HPL-type back and sides, or you could go for an all-solid guitar without any electronics. Of course, there are exceptions but generally speaking, omitting the cost of the electronics gives manufacturers room to offer solid tonewoods – which is where the E1D is positioned.

There's not much in the way of decorative embellishments, fancy inlays or 'bling'. Instead, Eastman has focussed on high quality materials, proving that less can be more.

The solid Sitka spruce bookmatched top here is a fine selection and has an almost quilted hue to it. The grain might not be as ruler-straight as on a high-end guitar, but that's missing the point somewhat. The solid sapele back and sides are also bookmatched, stain-finished and left open-pore. This is where the guitar's body skips the process where filler is applied to in-fill the wood's naturally occurring tiny pits and grain marks, leaving what some people refer to as an 'orange peel' effect. Open-pore finishes are not just about the aesthetics, the lack of five or six coats of gloss also leaves the wood freer to breathe and it is therefore more resonant.

Other materials employed here are ebony for the bridge, bridge pins, headstock veneer and fingerboard, mahogany for the three-piece neck, and bone for the nut and compensated saddle. The body is bound top and bottom with tortoise binding, and the pickguard is tortoiseshell, too. A peek inside reveals a very tidy interior, as well as hand-scalloped X-bracing. The guitar feels sturdy and robust, and every joint is clean and tight.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Takamine GD93-NAT** (£409) boasts a solid spruce top with three-piece rosewood/quilted maple back. The **Sigma SDM-ST** (£469) is a solid spruce/mahogany option, while the **Ibanez AVD11-ANS** (£449) has a solid spruce top with mahogany back and sides

IN USE

Putting the E1D through its paces, we're immediately struck by how loud this guitar is. The projection and volume is remarkable – maybe there's no need for onboard electronics! Bash away as hard as you wish and the E1D seems to have bags of headroom – at no point did the guitar flinch or begin to reach its limits.

Tonally, the sapele and Sitka spruce pairing combine to produce a recognisable midrange, punchy timbre that would be particularly well-suited as a songwriting tool. Choppy chord work, as well as soloing duties, are all handled admirably, although the lack of a cutaway means solos are prevented from extending too far up the higher reaches of the neck.

The E1D is a well-built, all-solid powerhouse of a dreadnought. Its biggest challenge is how heavily populated this price point is. Consumers with £500 to spend on an acoustic have a wealth of choices, but the E1D has enough about it to make it stand out from the crowd.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Simple, clean presentation
+ Massive volume and projection
+ All solid construction

– If you want bling, look elsewhere

The E1D is a stylish, uncomplicated, all-solid dreadnought that offers masses of projection and volume, and a familiar, likeable tone perfect for accompanying unamplified singers – all without breaking the bank

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Eastman E1D

- **PRICE** £499 (inc padded gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid dreadnought acoustic. Made in China
- **BUILD** Solid Sitka spruce top and solid, open-pore sapele back and sides with tortoise binding. Mahogany neck, ebony bridge and fretboard, bone nut and saddle
- **HARDWARE** Open-gear Ping V93N 3+3
- **ELECTRICS** None
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.4"/645mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.5mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at 1st fret, 30mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **FINISH** Gloss nitrocellulose top, open-pore satin finished neck, back and sides
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments **www.eastmanguitars.com**

GRETSCH
Honeyboy
AMES

HONEYBOY **30**

When it comes to Bandmaster-style amps, it's true what they say: good things really do come in threes. Huw Price gets a taste of Honeyboy's unique new take on the classic Fender circuit...

Honeyboy is a relatively new custom-amp manufacturer based just outside Glasgow. Wherever possible, owner Andy Smith does everything in-house, from populating the boards to powder-coating metal parts and even building solid hardwood cabinets. We checked out his 18 and 5 combos and visited his workshop in late 2017 and were suitably impressed – but this is something considerably louder.

Based on Fender's tweed Bandmaster combo, the Honeyboy 30's oak and beech cabinet houses three 10-inch speakers – two Jensen P10R alnicos and a ceramic Celestion G10 Greenback. The 30 is based on the narrow-panel tweed model – which The Who aficionados will know as the amp that partnered Pete Townshend's Gretsch 6120 to devastating effect on *Who's Next* and 1973's *Quadrophenia* – but with the added benefit of a negative feedback defeat switch.

One of the most distinctive hallmarks of Honeyboy's amps are their looks – with bright colours and reptile-skin effect vinyl never too far away. This particular 30 is something a bit different, however. We asked Andy if he could build the amp equivalent of a Gretsch White Falcon, and the results are spectacular! The shimmering white vinyl and gleaming gold won't be for everyone, admittedly – but such is the custom nature of Honeyboy's amps, you can opt to be as flash or restrained as you wish in the looks department.

IN USE

If you've played enough tweed amp circuits you'll probably be aware of the fact that, when there are two channels and four inputs, only one of them is likely to sound any good – namely Bright number 1. But the Honeyboy 30 has a surprise in store for us, because the Normal channel offers an eminently usable alternative voicing. We'll come back to that after we have examined our old friend, the Bright channel.

The term 'live one' is occasionally attributed to guitars that are extremely touch-sensitive and responsive, but sometimes it can apply to amps, too, and the Honeyboy 30 is just such a beast. Kicking off with our Gretsch 6120 conversion (of course), we're shocked to find that every little nuance of pick attack, flesh on string and even switch adjustment comes straight through the speakers. At first, this feels a bit unnerving, but it quickly becomes thrilling.

The amp's tone and volume controls interact noticeably, with the bass control in particular having an effect on gain as well as low-frequency content. With both tone controls set around halfway, the Honeyboy 30 stays clean until the volume reaches around three. However, if you roll back the bass, you get more clean headroom and the amp stays pretty clean until around five. Listen closely and you'll hear how turning the bass up introduces overdrive in the bass and low-mid frequencies to create an earthy roar.

Similarly, the treble control introduces a crunchier overdrive higher in the frequency range, so to an extent, you can balance all three controls to achieve the desired level of overdrive and target the frequencies at which that overdrive occurs. The range of tones and textures is very wide and, sticking with the Gretsch, we go from warm Chet Atkins cleans into the squeaky bite of Setzer and beyond into Malcolm Young grind.

SHIMMERING TREBLE IS LAYERED OVER GROWLING LOW-MIDS... OUR GRETSCH HAS NEVER SOUNDED THIS GOOD

But the real magic happens when the volume and treble controls are set around eight (out of 12) and the bass is dialled back. This is where we find the Townshend-style jangling powerchords of *Who's Next*, where shimmering treble is layered over growling low-mids to create the effect of an acoustic mixed with an electric. Our Gretsch has never sounded this good, but you don't need Filter'Trons

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES
HONEYBOY 30

- **PRICE** £1,675 (inc padded cover)
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel fixed-bias valve combo with negative feedback bypass switching, solid oak/beech cabinet. Made in UK
- **POWER RATING** 28W
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 2x 6L6, 5U4GB
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input sockets, volume, volume, treble, bass, master, presence, standby, power
- **REAR PANEL** 1x speaker outs, negative feedback defeat switch
- **SPEAKERS** 2x Jensen P10R alnico, 1x Celestion G10 Greenback
- **DIMENSIONS** 625x590x235mm
- **WEIGHT** 24.0kg/52.9lb
- **CONTACT** Honeyboy Amps 01389 499879 **www.honeyboyamps.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's own **'57 Bandmaster reissue** is no longer being made, but recent examples still appear for sale on Reverb for **£1,800** or thereabouts. The **Victoria Amplifiers 35310** 28-watt tweed is a versatile gigging amp with plenty of clean headroom – it costs around **£1,900**, but you'll have to ship if from the US

to do it. Swapping over to a non-reverse Firebird, we find P-90s produce very similar results.

Everything about the Bright channel reminds you how the Brownface and Blackface circuits were a logical progression from the larger late-50s tweeds. Adding some Catalinbread Topanga reverb, the Honeyboy 30 has that side of things largely covered and it can even do bell-like clean Hendrix tones.

The Normal channel deserves way more than the usual cursory mention. If your tastes in tweed tone veer towards thicker, dirtier, smaller models, such as the Deluxe, you may be even happier here. As you'd expect, the sound is somewhat darker, but it's far from dull, and there's no shortage of clarity.

There's ample gain here, too – aided and abetted by a smoother and sweeter overdrive and a softer transient attack, which creates the impression of enhanced sustain and is less brutally revealing. The growl and snarl of the Bright channel becomes a roaring grind as the Normal channel is pushed. You get roadhouse blues tones with a Strat and muscular classic-rock crunch and note bloom with a Les Paul.

Although the Normal channel has certain small-box tweed characteristics, the sheer volume, scale and breadth of the sound are anything but. Treble is hugely extended and bass is massive, so with both channels, and the Normal channel in particular, the bass control needs to be run quite low.

The negative feedback switch has more effect on feel than tone and it's a feature we like. We find it effective for softening the attack and lowering the overdrive threshold, so much depends on the amount of volume and clean headroom the situation demands. It does disengage the presence control, but with all the extra harmonics, you won't miss it.

Although Fender's tweed Twin (low power), Super, Pro and Bandmaster circuits are more or less the same, the amps themselves do sound different. Some attribute the Bandmaster's tone to the slightly odd relationship between its four-ohm output transformer and the 2.67-ohm load of three eight-ohm speakers wired in parallel.

We don't have a vintage Bandmaster on hand, but the Honeyboy overdrives more easily than a '59 Bassman we're able to compare it to. While it has a similar treble character, the Honeyboy 30 has looser lows and a more snarly and raunchy character. On balance, we prefer the way it plays and sounds.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Touch sensitivity, outstanding dynamics and superb tone
+ Two fabulously usable channels
+ Massive sonic scale
+ Huge selection of different styling options to choose from

– Fans of the classic Bassman tone might not love the looser lows

Classic tweed tone without any compromises, paired with truly outstanding build quality and a wide range of custom options

9/10

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BLACKSTAR UNITY 250 & 500 BASS AMPS

A range of brand new bass combos introduces the Blackstar name to lovers of low frequencies. Michael Heatley looks at the most powerful members of this united front...

Few can doubt the impact Blackstar has made on the six-string world since the UK company arrived on the scene a decade ago. Now however, the company has set its sights on the bass market – you may well ask what's taken them so long, but Blackstar is keen to emphasise the painstaking research and development that's gone into the new Unity Pro bass range.

The Unity series of bass combos exists in 30, 60, 120, 250 and 500-watt variations – an impressive range of sizes and specifications. We're looking at the most powerful, and very giggable, duo, while also considering the optional U250ACT powered cabinet (£379) that offers an additional 250 watts. Anyone stepping out of the rehearsal room to the concert stage is advised to check them out.

'Straightforward and powerful' are the Blackstar watchwords when it comes to the company's new bass combos – and the Unity 250's classic, clean looks certainly back up the boast. The 15-inch Eminence speaker is cloth-covered with the only ornamentation being a bespoke and coolly understated new single star logo, with the controls on top.

The no-nonsense black rotator knobs put us in mind of outboard studio gear and make it simple to change your settings on stage, the five mini-toggle switches below them slightly less so. That said, the set-up is intuitive enough to just 'plug in and play', but if you want to drill deeper, there are loads of sonic possibilities to investigate and experiment with, provided you don't mind consulting the manual.

IN USE

Both combos will happily cope with a five-string's low B string, and while the offering linear, 6L6 and 6550 modes – numbers valve enthusiasts will recognise. This works in conjunction with three preamp voicings – flat, modern and classic – to offer tone combinations from clean through to Bassman and SVT-like sounds.

BOTH COMBOS WILL HAPPILY COPE WITH A FIVE-STRING'S LOW B, AND HAVE A RANGE OF VERY GOOD TONES

Moving on to the top dog of the range, the 500, things are much the same – aside from the fact that it of course packs more punch and has a 2x10 speaker configuration – and the control panel is identical.

The panel offers a three-band EQ with semi-parametric sweepable mids, gain and master volume and a drive control that allows overdrive, distortion or fuzz to be mixed in with the clean signal, so it's in effect a blend control. Then there's a compressor and a 'response' control that simulates different valve stages, 500 has more heft than the 250 – as much due to its 2x10 configuration as anything else – on the whole the sounds are very similar and both amps have a range of very good tones.

The digital chorus and POG-style octave effects are dialled in by a pair of small, slightly fiddly, plastic switches at the rear of the unit. They are very usable, and would serve a fretless player particularly well – many bassists don't venture too far into the effects world, so it's nice that they're included. More commonly used are the overdrive, distortion and fuzz

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar Unity Bass 250

- **PRICE** £499
- **DESCRIPTION** Combo bass amp. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 250w
- **CONTROL PANEL** Gain, drive, low, lower/upper mids, high, response, compressor, master. Mini-toggle switches for preamp voices (classic, modern, flat), drive (overdrive, distortion, fuzz) and response (linear, 6L6, 6550) options
- **REAR PANEL** Power, footswitch, mp3/line in, line out, effects loop, chorus and octave levels, cabinet link
- **SPEAKER** Custom-designed 15" Eminence Opus driver
- **DIMENSIONS** 485(w) x 572(h) x 361mm(d)
- **WEIGHT** 19.2kg/42.3lb

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar Unity Bass 500

- **PRICE** £579
- **DESCRIPTION** Combo bass amp. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 500w
- **CONTROL PANEL** Gain, drive, low, lower/upper mids, high, response, compressor, master. Mini-toggle switches for preamp voices (classic, modern, flat), drive (overdrive, distortion, fuzz) and response (linear, 6L6, 6550) options
- **REAR PANEL** Power, footswitch, mp3/line in, line out, effects loop, chorus and octave levels, cabinet link
- **SPEAKERS** 2x10" custom-designed Eminence Opus drivers
- **DIMENSIONS** 485(w) x 612(h) x 361mm(d)
- **WEIGHT** 22kg/48.5lb
- **CONTACT** Blackstar 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

and these are perfectly adequate, and can be triggered by the included FS-13 footswitch, alongside the compression. This is useful to have of course, though we do notice an appreciable change in volume that needs to be compensated for.

If you wanted to get the full gamut of sonic versatility when gigging either of the Unity combos, we'd recommend forking out £69 for the five-button FS-12 foot controller. It makes everything easier to access on the fly – including those effects – and also gives you access to an built-in tuner, although the lack of a mute function is a little frustrating.

Linking the powered cab to the U250 via an XLR cable makes the sound fuller as well as louder, while the ability to stack the (slightly smaller) combo on top of the cab brings the output nearer to the ears when playing on stage. The cab's volume is only accessible from the rear, however, so you'll need to get your levels right at soundcheck.

The comparison between the U500 and the extension speaker-augmented U250 is interesting. The U500 kicks out a similar wattage and is only three kilos heavier than the less powerful combo alone. Thus it wins out over the amp and cab solution, despite breaking the all-important £500 barrier beyond which many buyers would consider the 'separates' route.

That said, the U250 alone would be adequate at most club gigs, and is keenly priced at £500. Since PA support is so common these days, the powered cab is a bit of a luxury, but one that has clear tone-enhancing benefits.

Though portability is a factor in many bassists' choice of equipment, Blackstar has decided not to go down that route. As a result both combos are chunky, and recessed side – rather than top-mounted – handles would have made for a much easier carry up and down stairs.

Blackstar claims the Unity concept "combines numerous tones across the stylistic spectrum," and while it remains to be seen if the amp giant can disrupt the bass world as it did the guitar market a decade ago, if you're playing small gigs and need a rugged, good sounding combo to provide some low-end thump, the Unity range won't let you down.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The MarkBass CMD102P (£869) is a 2x10 classic that is lightweight and tilts back, while the **Fender Rumble 500** (£496) is well established and attractively priced. On the 15-inch front, the stylish **Gallien Krueger MB115** (£436) offers a loud 200 watts

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Classic but distinctive looks at a competitive price
+ Intuitive layout
+ Works well with extension speaker
– Heavy one-handle lift
– Effects controls at rear are a bit fiddly sans footswitch

Both of these combos are plenty loud enough to handle most gigs, and won't let you down in the looks, build or tone departments either

8/10

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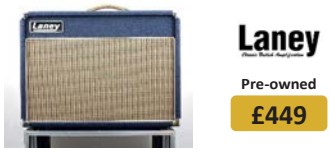
Electro-Acoustic with Undersaddle Piezo & Bridge Plate Sensor for Percussive Sounds. Comes with a Faith Hard Case.



Laney L5T-112 (Made in the UK)
5 watts All Valve. Digital Reverb. Celestion Greenback speaker. One of the last Laney amps to be made in the UK!

Blackstar Series One 10 AE
10th Anniversary Limited Edition. 10 watts All Valve. 12" Celestion 70/80 Speaker. KT-88 Power Valve.

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ZILLA CABS SPEAKER CABINETS

If you need a speaker cabinet with a specific look, sound and size, getting one custom made might be more affordable than you'd imagine. Huw Price hails a Zilla cab...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Based in Somerset, Zilla Cabs is a small family business that has been building guitar and bass cabinets for over a decade now, and in that time has developed a reputation for quality, customisation and great tone. Every Zilla cab is constructed using hand-chiselled finger joints, and you're given a huge array of hardware, driver, tolex and grille cloth options to ensure that your cab is exactly what you want it to be.

Here, we're looking at three of Zilla's 1x12 birch ply cabinets. The green unit is ported to overcome the bass-light characteristics of small cabinets, and although you can specify your preferred speaker, this is tuned for optimal response with its Celestion G12H-74 Creamback.

The two black cabs combine to form the 'Mini Stack'. It's designed to maximise sound spread, make your amp head's controls more accessible and be portable. A slightly thicker than usual birch ply is used, which increases baffle rigidity. Both Celestion-loaded, the flat-fronted cab contains a G12M Greenback and the slanted one has a Neo Creamback.

IN USE

None of these cabs is geared towards classic American tones, so our usual blackface and tweed types are set aside and for testing we're using a 15-watt Egnater Tweaker. We begin by dialling in a semi-driven tone with a Strat to provide a sonic reference point and once we're happy with the sound, the Egnater is disconnected from its onboard Celestion G12H and plugged into the ported cabinet.

Immediately the Egnater sounds bigger, wider and much improved. The bass is way deeper but it's also far more solid and the extra lows do not detract from clarity. High frequencies have sparkle and sheen without any harshness, but the ported cab's most impressive feature is its sheer slam. It's not overly aggressive or uncomfortable, but there's a solidity and swiftness that makes the Egnater sound livelier and more dynamic. It almost feels like you're playing through a closed back 2x12 or even a 4x12, and the scale of the sound belies what is actually a fairly small and portable cabinet.

Run on its own, the slanted cab sounds like a rather aggressive bass roll-off filter has been applied. The emphasis is very much on the mids and we notice a slight boxy, cocked wah honk. It's a tone we really like, with a touch of extra throatiness and a far smoother and more compressed response that sweetens overdrive in a very appealing way.

Although both cabs have much in common dynamically, the straight cab produces a more even frequency balance, less midrange colouration and a touch of extra clarity. This pair is meant to be used in tandem and the sum is sonically greater than its parts. It's a bold and room-filling sound that's very articulate and clear, yet player-friendly, too.

Inevitably, the tall and narrow stack has a somewhat directional response that's apparent when you walk outside the sweet spot. Interestingly this isn't the case with the ported cab, which proves equally room-filling and may even have the bigger tone.

Although we have always liked our Egnater Tweaker, we never realised quite how good it was until now. This is largely because each of these Zilla cabs lifts it into another league. And while the Mini Stack is impressive, no doubt, the Ported 1x12 is on another level – try one.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you're in the market for a high-quality speaker cab, you could do worse than investigate the **Mesa/Boogie Thiele Box Custom 2** (£662), **Morgan 112** (£573), **Friedman PT-112** (£568), **Victory Amplifiers V112-WC-75** (£470) and **Orange PPC112** (£310)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Extremely good build quality
+ No extraneous buzzes or rattles whatsoever
+ Very impressive tone

– Looks and build geared primarily towards rock players
– No parallel link connection on the angled stack

Particularly well made and affordable cabs that can be built to customer specs and sound excellent

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Zilla Ported 1x12 Cabinet

- **PRICE** £370
- **DESCRIPTION** Ported 1x12" speaker cabinet with Celestion G12H-75 Creamback. Made in UK
- **POWER RATING** 75W
- **REAR PANEL** 1x speaker jack input
- **DIMENSIONS** 460 x 530 x 300mm
- **WEIGHT** 17.5kg/38.6lbs

Zilla Mini Stack Straight 1x12

- **PRICE** £340
- **DESCRIPTION** Ported 1x12" speaker cabinet with Celestion G12M greenback. Made in UK
- **POWER RATING** 25W
- **REAR PANEL** 1x speaker jack input
- **DIMENSIONS** 470 x 490 x 300mm
- **WEIGHT** 15.6kg/34.4lb

Zilla Mini Stack Angled 1x12

- **PRICE** £380
- **DESCRIPTION** Ported 1x12" speaker cabinet with Celestion Neo Creamback. Made in UK
- **POWER RATING** 60W
- **REAR PANEL** 1x speaker jack input
- **DIMENSIONS** 490 x 470 x 260mm (top depth)
- **WEIGHT** 13.8kg/30.4lb
- **CONTACT** Zilla Cabs 01934 750000 **www.zillacabs.com**

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GAIN
FREQ
THIN
FAT
BANDWIDTH
PDF
2
CLEAN
DIRTY
ON/OFF
STONE
DEAF

STONE DEAF PDF-2 & EP-1 EXPRESSION PEDAL

Can the addition of an expression pedal turn an EQ-filtering overdrive into some kind of secret analogue multi-effects unit? Richard Purvis steps on it…

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Well spotted, Inspector Plectrum – we have already reviewed the Stone Deaf PDF-2, back in 2016. But it's come back, like one of those cats that goes missing for two years then suddenly appears in the kitchen… and it's brought a friend.

Expression pedals can add flexibility to all sorts of stompboxes, but the active EP-1 turns this EQ, boost and overdrive tool into a whole different kind of device. You're using your foot to manipulate a frequency control that can be heavily filtered – and that brings wah and phaser effects into the picture.

Inspired by the Maestro MPF-1, the PDF-2 combines tone-sculpting with lashings of gain. Frequency and height controls let you choose which part of the tonal spectrum to cut or boost, and by how much, while the five-way bandwidth dial changes the focus of the filtering, and therefore how extreme it sounds. There's a gain control, active only when you've stomped on the left-hand footswitch to engage 'dirty' mode, and it runs all the way from warm crunch to fuzzy sonic mayhem.

Both units are metal-clad slabs of old-fashioned British engineering, and the EP-1 even has adjustable treadle bolts so you can tweak the resistance of the rocking action.

IN USE

It's amazing how much fun you can have with a one-band parametric EQ – and that goes for double when it's as good as this. Any slice of the spectrum can be emphasised at will, and with bandwidth set narrow you can twiddle your way through every flavour of the 'cocked wah' effect. Hi-fi mid-scooping is just as easily achieved, while at full bandwidth the PDF-2 offers something close to a full-frequency clean boost.

So far, so useful… but if you wanted 'useful' you'd be reading *Practical Grouting*. So let's stomp on the dirty channel, because this is where the truly great stuff lives. The overdrive itself is thick and smooth, but it's in combination with the EQ filtering that it opens up all manner of new rock voices: thudding sludge power, woody mid-gain clonk, snarling punk grind… it's an almost infinite palette, and you can see why Josh Homme's a fan.

How the EP-1 feeds into all of this depends on where you set the height control. At minimum the mids are hollowed out for something like a manual phaser effect, while nearer the top of the dial the boosted frequencies leap out to create some classic (and some weirdly synth-like) wah tones.

THE ACTIVE EP-1 TURNS THIS EQ, BOOST AND OVERDRIVE TOOL INTO A WHOLE DIFFERENT KIND OF DEVICE

But in truth the EP-1 is arguably at its best when you don't use it too much. Rhythmic rocking is fine, but subtly creeping through the range is even more effective for creating fresh and dynamic sonic textures.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Honk, scoop, thump, rasp – it's all here at your feet
+ Really comes alive with the overdrive engaged
+ Plugging in the EP-1 opens up wah/phase/synthy possibilities

– There's no indicator of which channel is selected when in bypass mode
– Our review EP-1 is too easy to switch off by mistake

The addition of the expression pedal turns a fine EQ filter and overdrive into a proper tonal chameleon

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Stone Deaf PDF-2

- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel EQ, boost and overdrive pedal. Made in UK
- **PRICE** £140
- **CONTROLS** Height, gain, frequency, five-way rotary bandwidth switch, clean/dirty and bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** TRS input for EP-1 expression pedal only, true bypass, powered by 9V battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 148x90x70mm

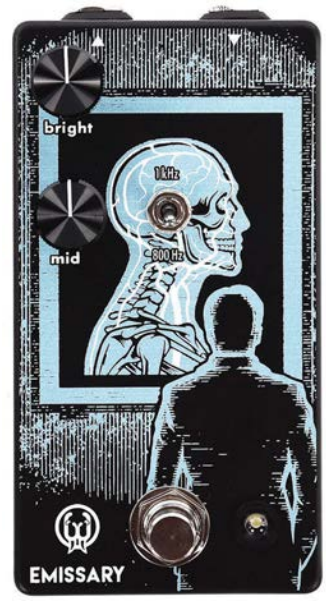
Stone Deaf EP-1

- **DESCRIPTION** Active expression pedal. Made in UK
- **PRICE** £120
- **CONTROLS** Bypass frequency, bypass footswitch at top of travel
- **FEATURES** Adjustable bolts for treadle resistance, powered by 9V battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 245x117x84mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group **audiodistributiongroup.com** **stonedeaffx.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE…

The old **EHX Graphic Fuzz** (**£144**) and not-so-old **Cock Fight** (**£115**) offer two different EHX approaches to the distortion/EQ combo. For more tonal freedom, the **Empress ParaEq** (**£255**) combines a three-band parametric EQ with up to 30dB of boost

bright
1kHz
mid
800Hz
EMISSARY



WALRUS AUDIO EMISSARY

It promises a 'sinus-clearing experience' for your tone, but will this anatomically-themed dual booster from Oklahoma boutique mavericks Walrus get the blood pumping for Richard Purvis?

There are times when it feels like all the good band names are taken, and it's starting to get that way with effects pedals. Not that 'Emissary' is a bad name for a pedal, but Walrus's explanation of this boost pedal's monicker – named for the veins that connect the inside and outside of the skull, of course! – indicates the thought processes are getting increasingly obtuse.

The name might be confusing initially, but the pedal itself is pretty simple. It offers two boost circuits running in parallel – one JFET with the emphasis on higher frequencies, one focused on the midrange – that can be blended to taste. Add a toggle switch for flipping the centre frequency of that mid-boost between 800Hz and 1kHz, and that's your lot.

Oh, except that there is one more nifty feature: like the EarthQuaker Devices Pyramids we reviewed in August, the Emissary has a footswitch that automatically goes into latching mode if you hold it down – a potentially useful function if you only want to be louder than your band for a couple of bars at a time.

IN USE

Starting with both dials at zero – silence – we bring up the bright boost until, around 10 o'clock, we get something like the bypass signal, but with a hint of extra top end. Crank it past halfway, and it becomes clear that this is really a full-range level-lifter with some added zing, rather than a pure treble booster. If you're looking for something to give your solos more loudness, more overdrive (amp permitting) and more cut in the pick attack, then this could be the knob for you. It's mighty addictive.

bandwidth is even more pronounced – and if you do find it too honky, you always have the option of dialling in the fuller-voiced bright boost to make things more balanced.

And that's the key with the Emissary. You're not getting the flexibility of a fully parametric booster here, but it's surprising how much ground you can cover with such minimal controls. Walrus's staff might not be our first choice for anatomy lessons, but the Oklahomans certainly know their stuff when it comes to ingenious pedal design.

THE EMISSARY OFFERS TWO BOOST CIRCUITS RUNNING IN PARALLEL THAT CAN BE BLENDED TO TASTE

Now we put the bright boost back in its cage to let the mid control have a run around… and it couldn't be a more different animal. With this dial at 10 o'clock and the switch set to 1kHz, the result is not so much a midrange boost as a bass chasm. It sounds odd at first but makes sense when you turn it up: we're not quite in cocked-wah territory, but this is a strongly mids-focused sound that has a likeable character of its own, especially with overdrive.

Flipping to 800Hz, now we really do get the sound of a wah pedal stuck at halfway. The squeezed

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Bright boost offers a tastefully judged lift for solos
+ Mid boost provides a bolder but still usable alternative voice
+ Parallel circuitry opens up a range of combination tones
– Some might find a standard multi-band EQ pedal more intuitive
– Dual footswitches would have made this a more gig-friendly pedal

A more versatile pedal than it first appears, and a potential secret weapon for your pedalboard

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Walrus Audio Emissary

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** Parallel dual boost pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Bright boost level, mid boost level, mid-boost 800Hz/1kHz switch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 126 x 65 x 56mm
- **CONTACT** Face Distribution +32 3844 6797 **face.be** **walrusaudio.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Orange Two Stroke** (**£109**) has an active EQ for fully tweakable boosting, while the **Bigfoot Trouble Booster** (**£129**) offers both full-frequency and Rangemaster-style circuits. EQ-focused boosting is also one of the many talents of **Stone Deaf**'s **PDF-2** (**£140**)

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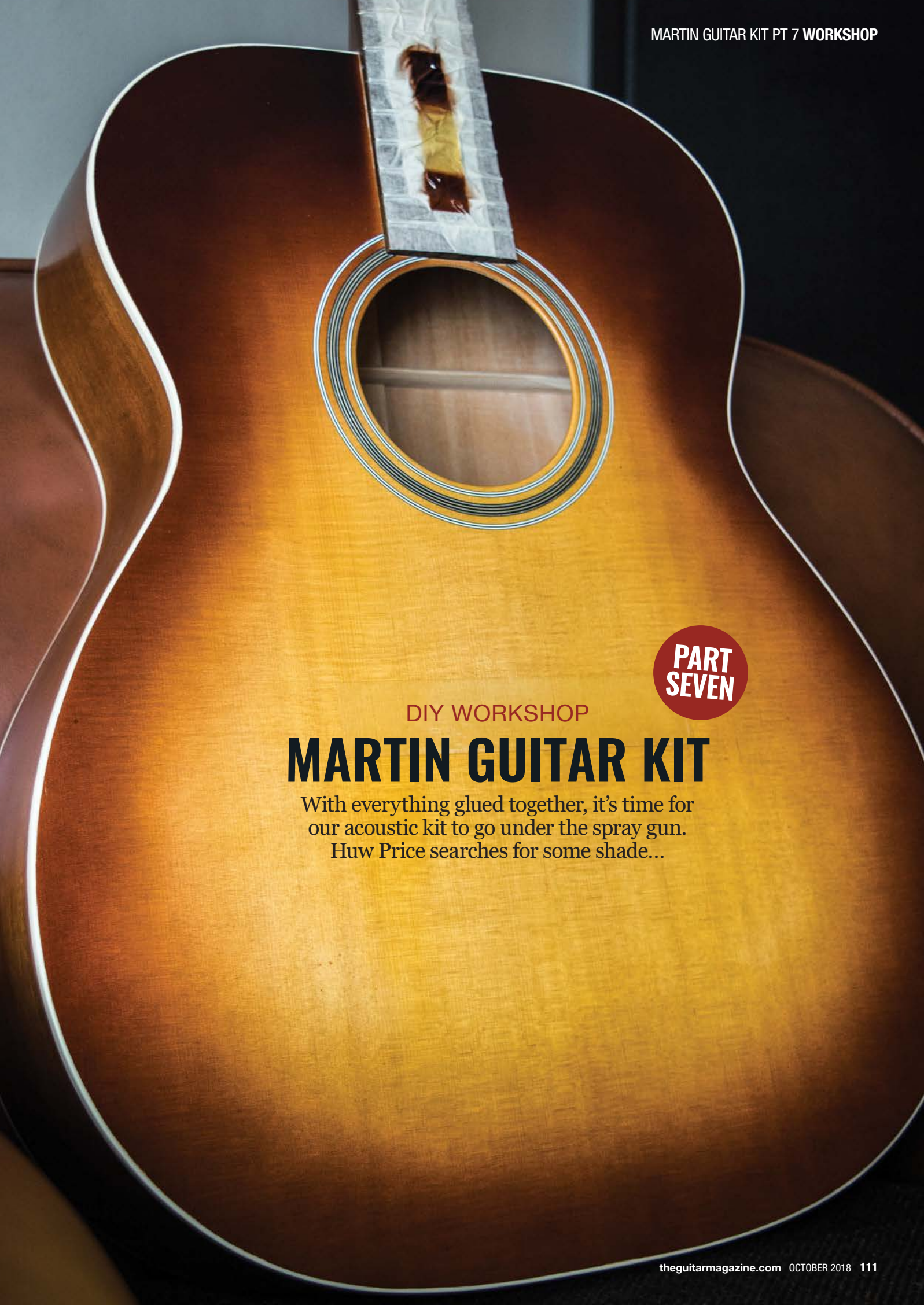
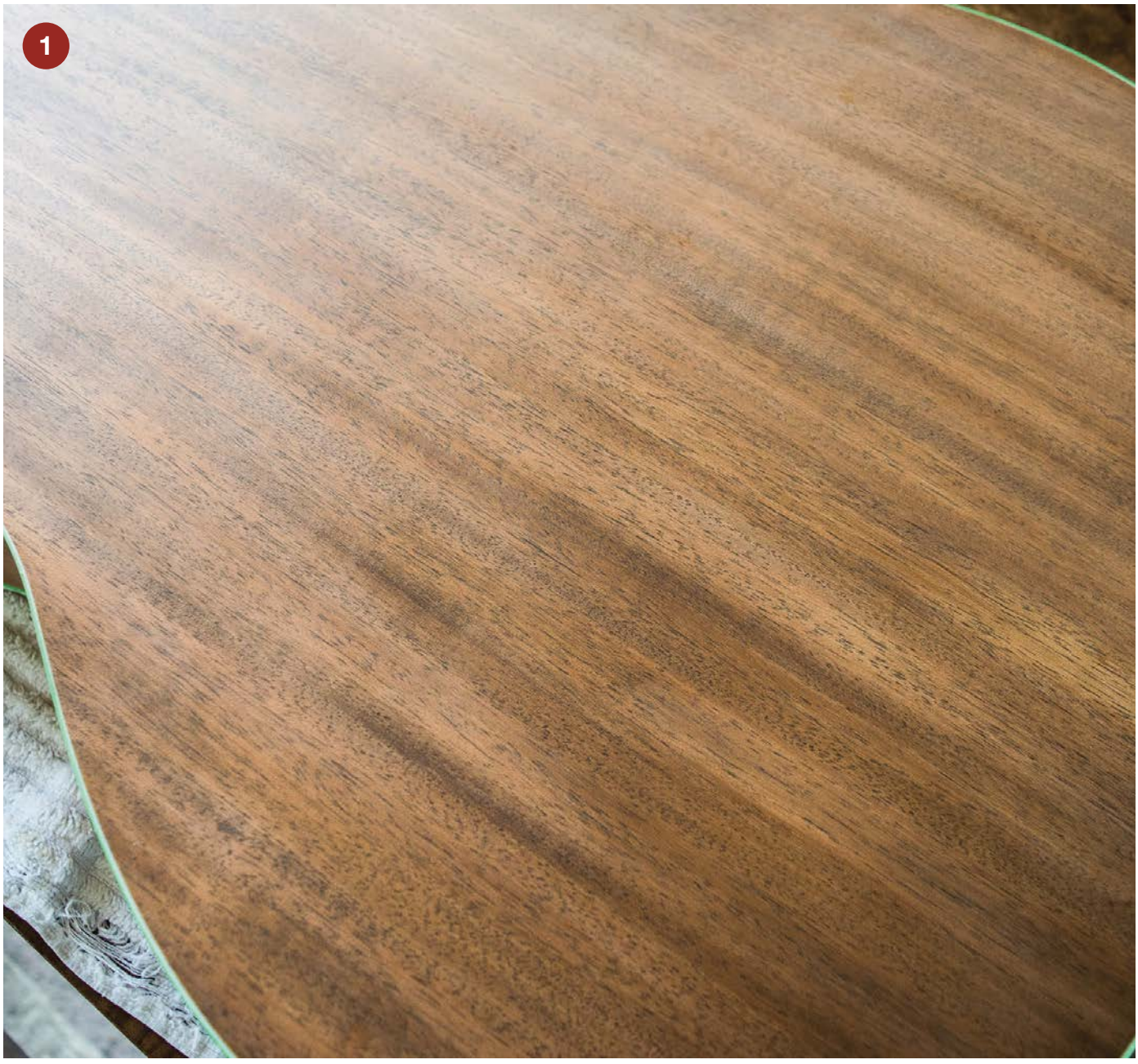


PART SEVEN

DIY WORKSHOP

MARTIN GUITAR KIT

With everything glued together, it's time for our acoustic kit to go under the spray gun. Huw Price searches for some shade...



1 Dark grain filler enhances the grain, adds depth of colour to the mahogany and, once sanded, provides a smooth surface

2 Super Glue is used as a grainfiller on the ziricote veneer to preserve the colour and strengthen the fibres

3 The Super Glue sands easily and accentuates the ziricote's colours

4 If left overnight, cellulose sealer sands very easily and it's essential for achieving a flat surface

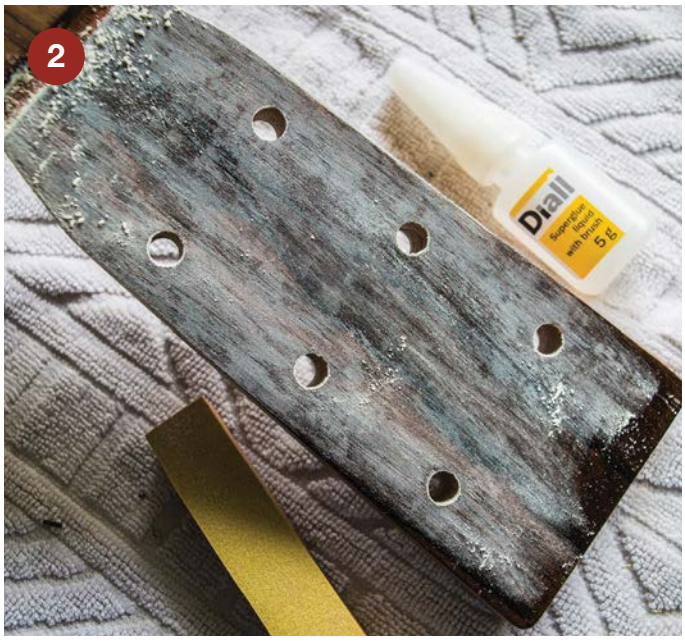
5 Whether you're levelling sealer or top coats, shining light across the surface reveals shiny spots that need more levelling

Finishing up our Martin Guitar Kit inevitably means applying the finish, and while the actual spraying part requires more diligence than skill per se, the key to achieving a pro quality finish is preparation – most of the work should already done before you even reach for the spray cans. It quickly becomes apparent that merely sanding the mahogany back will be insufficient to achieve a smooth surface: the grain is extremely open and somewhat 'furry' in places. I wipe the surface with a damp cloth to raise the grain, allow the wood to dry, and then sand.

After a few damping and sanding cycles, the surface feels okay; and the sides get the same treatment. The neck is carved from much denser mahogany, so straight sanding with 220 grit is all that's needed. Before applying the grain filler, I tape over the fingerboard and the top binding, and cover the soundboard with greaseproof paper to protect them from becoming stained and to make the cleanup easier. Colron Teak grain filler is mixed with powdered burnt umber pigment and diluted to a double-cream consistency.

Pressing the grain filler into the mahogany is a messy job and sanding it all smooth again always seems to take an age – especially when a guitar requires two or more applications, as this does. But done right, you should end up with a very smooth surface with filler packing the open pores. In this case, the dark filler accentuates the grain and the pale mahogany acquires a far richer colour. However, I decide to try something different for the ziricote headstock veneer, because the pores are extremely open, it's slightly flaky, and I don't want to obscure the grain pattern.

For the first time, I try using Super Glue as a grain filler, applying a few small drops at a time and quickly spreading it over the surface before it dries. The fumes are nasty, so I'd suggest working outdoors, using a breathing mask – or both. The water-thin Super Glue wicks into the pores and sets very hard. I sand it back with 320 grit paper on a small sanding block and, after a couple of applications, I'm left with a very flat and smooth surface. Better still, the grain pattern is enhanced and there's more colour variation in the ziricote than was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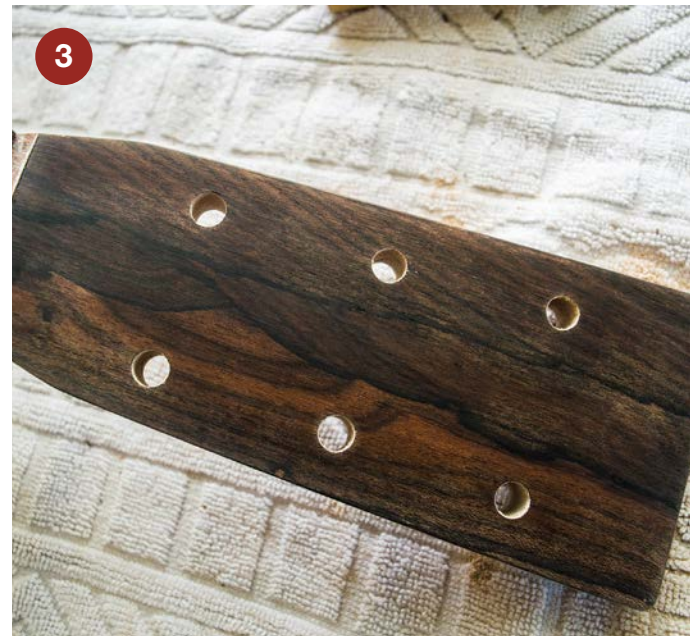
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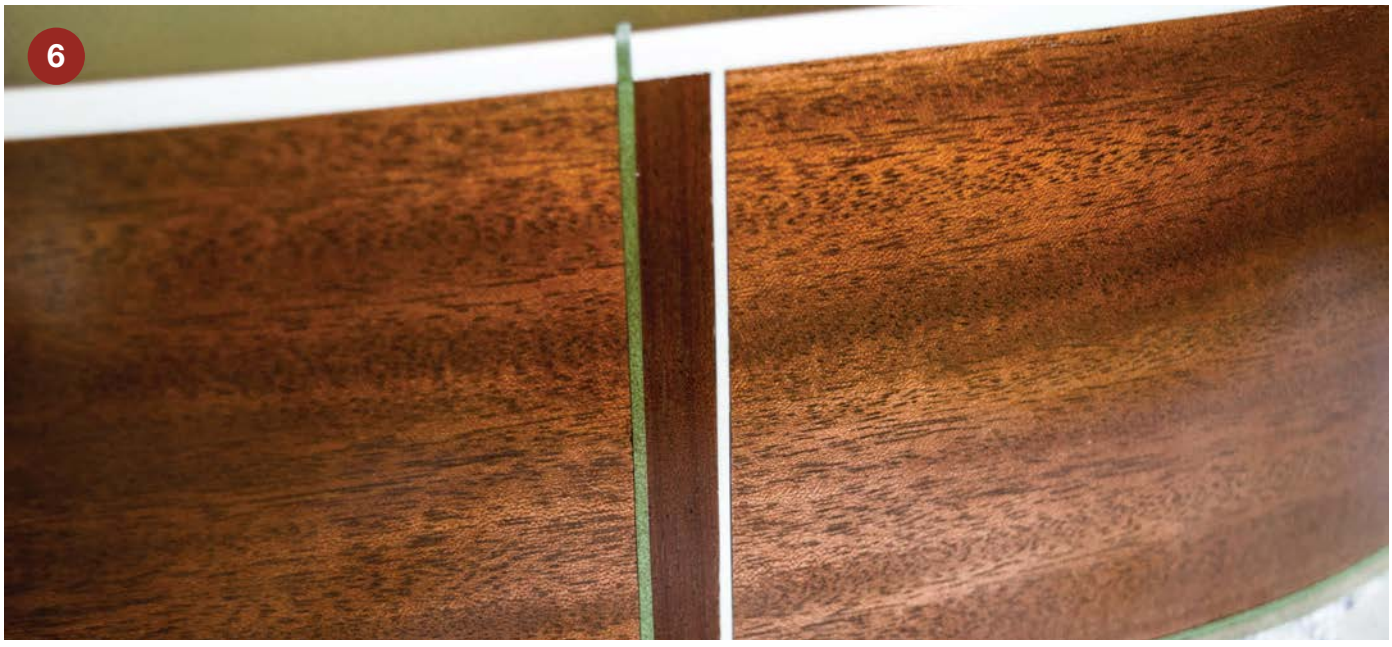

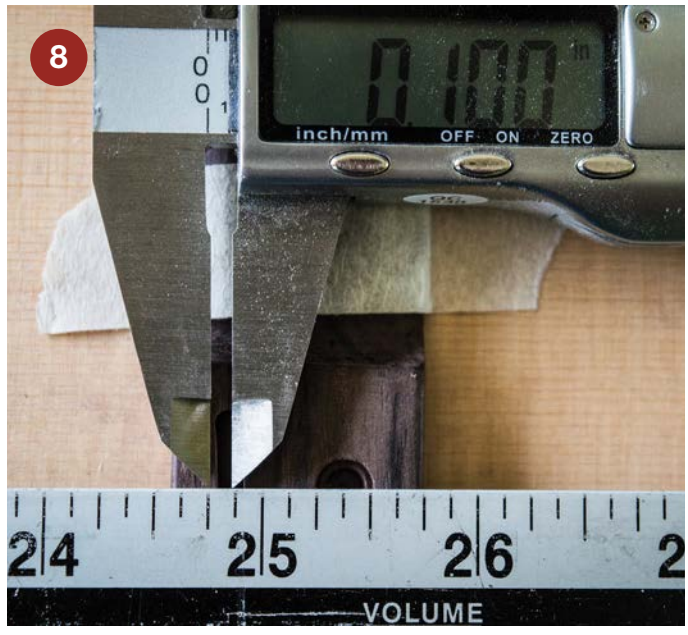

6 Remembering all the little areas that need masking makes finishing an acoustic a time-consuming process

7 After the mahogany is treated to two light coats of medium brown, a blade is used to scrape the binding

8 A metal ruler and digital callipers confirm the centre of the saddle slot is 24.75 inches plus 0.1 inches away from the nut at the first (top E) position

previously apparent. This works so well, I use Super Glue on the rosewood heel cap, too.

GET YOUR COAT ON

The front is covered once again and fresh plastic edging tape is applied to the binding. With the fingerboard also masked off, I ensure that all the filler dust has been removed from the body and neck, then I lay down three coats of Manchester Guitar Tech's Cellulose Sanding Sealer. This is left overnight before being sanded smooth: I do most of the work with 240 grit paper, and then switch to 0000-grade wire wool. First I go with the grain, then across it and I finish up with figure-of-eight movements. If you use wire wool, it's important to remove all trace of it before spraying, but it really is very effective for creating a smooth surface ready for spraying.

I apply two coats of Manchester Guitar Tech's Clear Medium Brown Lacquer, 30 minutes apart, and after an hour, I remove the tape from the back binding and the two strips of plastic at the tail. A fresh utility knife blade is used to scrape the exposed edge and reveal the clear off-white binding. I also use the blade and some 320-grit paper to soften the binding corner. Next, I spray two coats of clear lacquer and after a few hours, I remove the protective paper and edging tape from the front binding.

BRIDGE LOCATION

Before spraying the front, we need to talk about the bridge location. The bridge must be stuck to the body very securely, and that means wood against wood, not wood against lacquer. Acoustic builders have two ways to work around this problem. The first is to spray, cut and polish the front, and then mark the bridge location to scrape away the finish. The second is to determine the bridge location prior to spraying, and mask off the area with tape before you start. I prefer the latter.

Getting the bridge position correct is critical, because it determines the string path and whether the guitar will play in tune. Martin's instructions are pretty clear and they recommend that the centre point of the saddle slot directly in front of the first (high E) string pin should be the scale length plus 0.1 inches.

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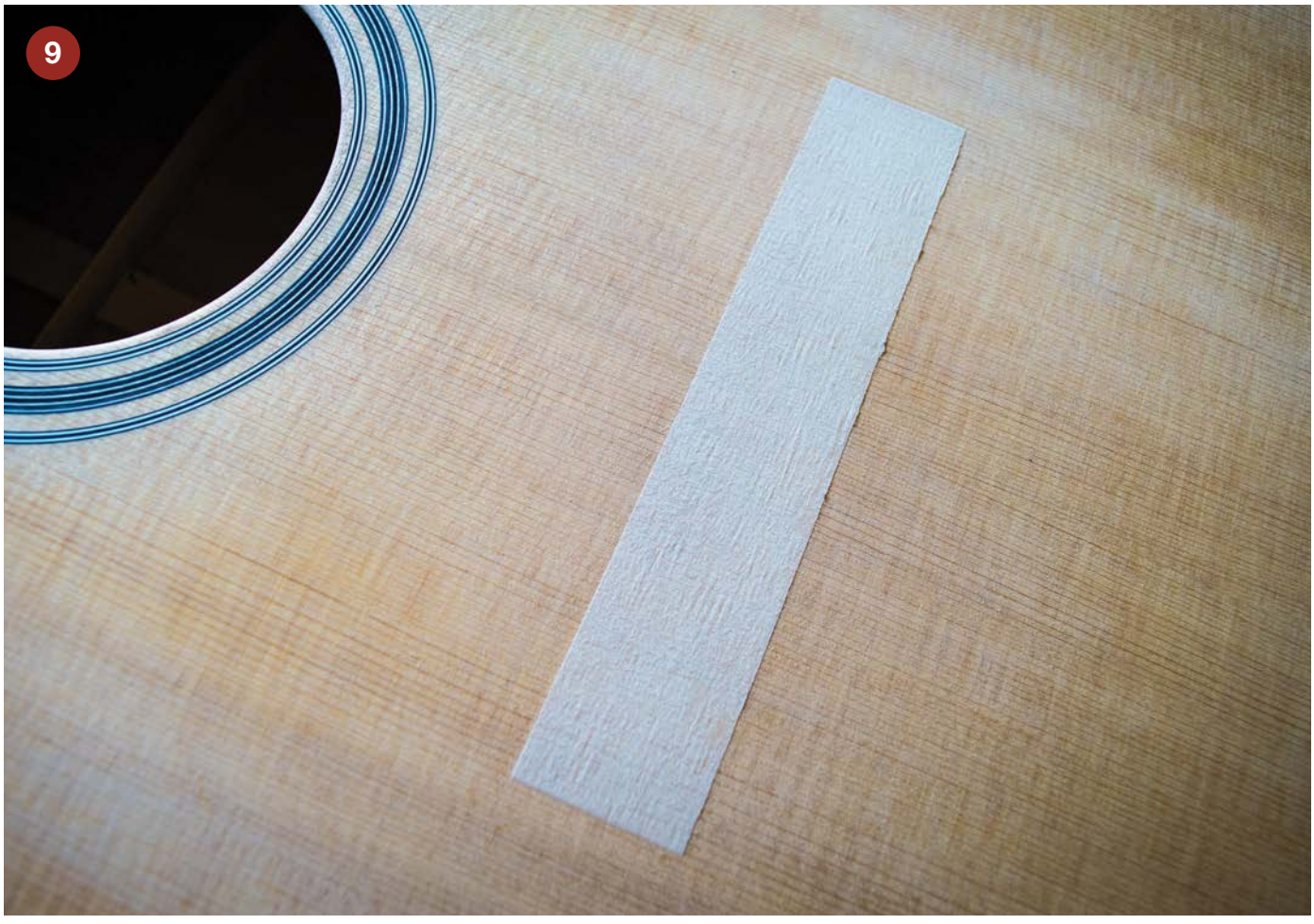

9 A strip of masking tape keeps the bridge area free from lacquer – don't forget to stuff the soundhole before spraying

10 After four coats of sealer and a lot of sanding, the spruce is ready for colour coats

11 Plastic edging tape is used to protect the three soundhole rings

12 After two tinted clear coats, the spruce takes on a golden-amber colour

To find this position, I tape a 36-inch steel ruler onto the fretboard with the starting point exactly in line with where the nut's leading edge will end up. I read 12.38-inch at the 12th fret, so the centre of the saddle slot has to be 24.75 inches plus 0.1 inches for compensation. With this point established, the bridge is taped to the top at the treble side.

Now I have to ensure the bridge is square to the neck – and I once came a cropper doing this. Standard procedure is to measure from the 14th fret to the front corners of the bridge, making sure that the distance is identical on both sides. Having successfully positioned the bridges on my first two acoustic builds, my third acoustic ended up with the bridge too far towards the bass side. My measurements were correct, but it turned out the post holes had been drilled off-centre.

This time, I measure from the 14th fret to the front edge of the bridge on both sides and I double-check that the pin holes are properly centred. Once I'm happy with everything, I secure the bridge in place with a bridge clamp and double-check all the measurements.

Low-tack masking tape is placed all around the bridge; the bridge is then removed, and I cut out a piece of masking tape that is exactly the same size as the bridge – minus about 0.5mm all the way around. After placing it in position on the spruce, I remove the guide tape. Once the finishing process is complete, I'll peel it off to reveal perfectly flat bare wood.

FRONTING UP

After masking off the back, sides and neck (a fairly lengthy procedure), I steam out a few dents in the spruce and spray two coats of cellulose sanding sealer about 30 minutes apart. I leave it to dry for a few hours, then I flatten the sanding sealer back with 320 grit paper – only to discover I need at least two more coats.

Spruce is quite porous, so it seems to soak up regular lacquer like a sponge. There are also areas of open grain, as well as quite tight grain. The bottom line is that sanding sealer isn't a stage you can skip if you want a flat and smoothly finished top. After four coats of sealer, a lot of sanding and rubbing down with wire wool, the spruce is ready for its top coats. It's been my intention all along to do a sunburst finish. Even after seeing the perfectly smooth and cross-silked spruce after the base coats, I decide to press ahead. I must be a glutton for punishment, because I'm letting myself in for a load more work.

RING WRATH

The first task is to mask off the rosette rings, so I measure the width of the outer and inner rings – 2.5mm/5mm/2.5mm – and head to my local car-paints shop to buy edging tape. Frustratingly, they only have two sizes in stock – 4mm and 6mm – but I buy them both anyway. Lengths of the 4mm tape are laid out as straight as possible along a kitchen surface offcut and I trim the edges to bring it closer to 2.5mm. After attempting this with a ruler and a utility-knife blade, I revert to cutting the tape freehand.

For the wider centre band, I cut a centre line straight through the 6mm tape and mask off the band in two passes with an overlap in the middle. The only tricky thing about masking this rosette is cutting the angles where the rings disappear beneath the fingerboard. Plastic edging tape is way more pliable than regular masking tape, so it's far better suited to going around curves. It also has just the right amount

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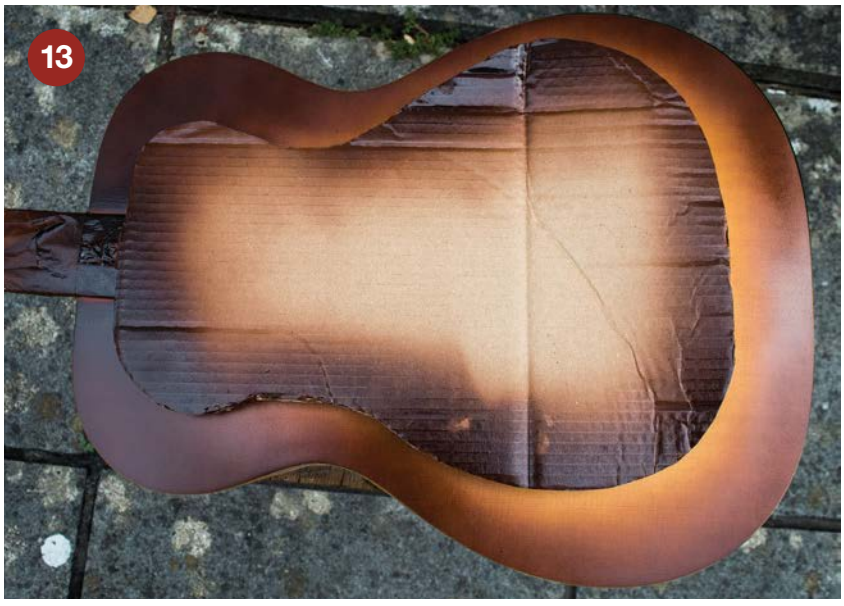

13 A cardboard mask is placed over the body with a gap underneath to protect the light centre section from the darker lacquer

14 The medium brown builds up quite quickly around the edges, and this sunburst just needs a few more coats before it's complete

15 With the sunburst complete, the tape is removed from around the soundhole to reveal bright rings

of tackiness, and you get much cleaner and sharper lines when you're covering binding, inlays and so forth.

HERE COMES THE SUNBURST

With acoustic sunbursts – aka 'shaded tops' – it's necessary to consider both the colour and shape. Regarding the spray patterns, Martin sunbursts seem to follow the outer edge of the body, whereas Gibsons tend to have a teardrop shape with more shading on the upper bout. You can see all sorts of colours on vintage acoustics. At one extreme, there's bright yellow with a soft cherry brown around the edges. At the other, there's deep, orangey amber with tobacco brown or even black edges.

All along, I've wanted a look that's more Gibson than Martin, and I decide to shoot for an amber centre with reddish-brown edges. I follow my usual modus operandi of looking at pictures online, sending them to Steve Robinson and asking him how to do it. He recommends tinted clear followed by medium-brown clear for the 'burst. The tinted clear is preferred to amber, because it's less yellow. When spraying, I go side to side, in straight overlapping lines, then along the length and finally crossways at 45 degrees. Having completed those passes, I consider that one coat, set the timer on my phone for 30 minutes and busy myself with something else while I'm waiting. When the alarm goes off, I don my breathing mask (as always) and apply a second coat. By that stage, I feel the colour is even enough and sufficiently intense to move onto the 'burst.

Since I have only attempted a handful of sunburst finishes in the past, I decide to play it safe on this occasion and make a cardboard shield. The shield is cut to follow the body shape, with a 5cm gap around the edges. It's positioned over the top, with sticky spacers placed on the fingerboard and the bridge tape. The medium-brown clear is sprayed with the aerosol can held over the centre and directed outwards. I spray light passes, keeping the aerosol moving constantly to prevent localised build-up of lacquer. Keeping the shield a couple of centimetres above the body enables you to achieve a relatively soft transition line between the colours. Even so, once the outer edges are more or less the right shade, I still need to bring the 'burst closer to the centre.

The shield is removed from the top and I hold it in my left hand as I spray with my right. This allows me to expand the outer edge, while protecting the centre from stray lacquer. For the most part, it works, but I still end up with a few unwanted dark spots. But it all adds to the 'vintage vibe' and you have to look fairly closely to see them.

The medium brown gets darker as its thickness increases: and the darker it gets, the more I like it. Eventually, I end up with slightly more depth of colour around the upper bout and a sunburst pattern that's somewhere between a Gibson and a Martin. While the finish is still fairly soft, I remove the rosette tape, scrape the top edge of the binding with a fresh utility blade and remove all the masking from the neck and body. It's far from perfect, but I'm fairly happy with the look and I particularly like the way the rosette pops out of the 'burst. Hopefully, it will look better after some light tint clear and gloss coats, followed by a good polish. All being well, I should very soon be gluing the bridge on and stringing this guitar up for the first time.

Thanks to Steve Robinson of (manchesterguitartech.co.uk) for his fine lacquer and sage guitar-spraying advice

NEXT MONTH...

Watching paint dry is no fun, so while we're waiting, Huw begins a new project adapting a vintage 20-watt projector amplifier for guitar use, for a total cost of less than £200…

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Dick Denney (left) and Dave Clark of The Dave Clark Five with the Vox Supreme in 1967

DICK DENNEY

Dartford in Kent can lay claim to making two lasting and profound contributions to guitar music – The Rolling Stones and Vox amplifiers. Huw Price profiles the man who helped power the pop...

The man who many regard as the UK's most important guitar amp designer was actually deaf in one ear, but Dick Denny's perforated eardrum may have been the making of him. As a result of his affliction, he was exempted from military service during the Second World War and seconded to the Vickers munitions factory – something that would permanently alter the trajectory of his life.

During the pre-war years, Dick had become infatuated with both jazz music and radio electronics. Early experiments resulted in the inevitable destruction of the family radio, but Dick's skills improved and his wages from the factory enabled him to buy components. His work at Vickers also meant that Dick was freed from an unwanted apprenticeship in his father's barber shop, and perhaps most importantly of all, it introduced him to a man named Tom Jennings.

During the war, amateur radio activity was prohibited so, as a guitarist, Dick turned his electronic skills to amplifier building. His goal was to develop an amplifier that was loud, but also small and light – and he had ample opportunity to test them out.

Munitions factories were understandably a choice target for the Luftwaffe's bombing attacks, and a as a result, the staff at Vickers spent extended periods sheltering during air raids. Entertainment was in short supply down in the shelters, and so to keep up morale, Dick, Tom Jennings and a few other members of the workforce would put on musical performances – these performances with Jennings gave Dick a chance to test and refine his amp designs.

PLANNING AHEAD

Jennings was clearly impressed with what Dick had produced, and being of an entrepreneurial mind, discussed a joint venture with Denny where they'd produce amplifiers for organs and accordions together. However, nothing ever came of the plan, and after the end of the war, the pair went their separate ways and lost contact.

By 1951 Jennings was running the fairly successful Jennings Organ Company, but it soon become apparent that diversification was necessary to grow the business. He also owned a music shop and would notice growing interest in guitars during the early rock 'n' roll years.

DURING AIR RAIDS, DICK WOULD PUT ON MUSICAL PERFORMANCES, WHICH ALSO GAVE HIM A CHANCE TO TEST AND REFINE HIS EARLY AMP DESIGNS

Since there were very few guitar amps available in the UK, and becoming an importer for American Gibson and Fender amps wasn't viable, Jennings tried to adapt one of his organ amplifiers for guitar. It proved unsuccessful, and the project was shelved.

Meanwhile Dick Denney had set up in business as an electronics and radio repairer, while moonlighting as a busy dance band guitarist. However, in 1952 he suffered a collapsed lung and was forced to take time off to recuperate.

Dick kept busy by resuming work on guitar amps and by 1955 his efforts had culminated in a 6V6-driven 15-watt combo amp with a single 12-inch speaker. The following year he added a Wurlitzer-inspired vibrato circuit, with a mod that provided tremolo, too. Unfortunately, Dick's amp was prone to noise due to the octal preamp valves he was using. A re-design using EF86, ECC83 and EL84 valves solved the noise issues while retaining the tone.

Dick first built two of these redesigned amps – one for himself and another for his a colleague. Suitably impressed by his friend's creation, that colleague decided there might be a wider audience for it – as providence would have it, he decided to take the amp in to Tom Jennings' shop to see if he was interested in ordering a couple. Jennings soon realised who it was who'd built the amp, and two days later he called at Dick's house to offer him a job. Jennings Musical Industries (JMI) was formed in 1957 to put Dick's amplifier into full production under the brand name Vox.

FINDING HIS FEET

While the original amp was a good first step, much redevelopment work was needed on his design before it would be ready for the public. But by the end of January 1958, the first Vox amp was ready and they called it the AC1/15, later shortened to AC15.

The AC15 caught on fast, with top stars of the day such as The Shadows soon using them. But while 15 watts may have been sufficient for dance bands, the newer rock 'n' rollers needed more volume – if only to hear themselves over screaming fans. Vox introduced two more amps in late 1958 – the AC4 and AC10 – but that was a move in the wrong direction for the bigger outfits.

The Shadows had tried a 60-watt Fender Twin on Charring Cross Road, and while they were impressed with the volume, they preferred the smoother and richer Vox tone with its softer overdrive characteristics. They suggested a 'twin AC15' but Jennings was reluctant.

In the BBC documentary *Vox Pop*, former JMI engineer Rodney Angell recalls how Dick's proposal for a doubled up AC15 was dismissed by Jennings as being "too heavy, too loud, too big" and that Dick should "go away and forget about it".

But Dick knew that he was onto something, and recognising EL84 valves, cathode biasing and an absence of negative feedback as the key ingredients of the Vox tone, Dick started building some twin versions of the AC15 for The Shadows without Jennings' approval or knowledge. He wouldn't keep it quiet for long, however – Jennings spotted the extra parts orders, and furiously summoned Dick into his office. And a proper row ensued, but Dick walked out with permission to build 10 more after Jennings told him "on your head be it".

The rest, as they say, is history. The Shadows took delivery of their first three units of what was christened the AC30 in late 1959, and within a few years it would go on to power the biggest band of all time, The Beatles. Some even consider the AC30 to be the greatest guitar amp of all – and without Dick Denny's persistence and conviction, it might never have even been made.

BIG BOOST

The early AC30/4 had four inputs and an EF86 pentode preamp, but the EF86 was a bit too delicate for high volume duties. The preamp was re-designed with a more robust ECC83 dual triode, which allowed for an extra channel and six inputs. Introduced in 1960, this version is called the AC30/6.

Inevitably the AC30/6 sounded different because it had less gain, sensitivity and clarity. Customers complained their Strats didn't sound like The Shadows' records, so Vox tried a stopgap solution with a specialised lead guitar version called the AC30/6 Treble – but Dick knew that something more was needed.

Dick and his team devised an add-on module built on an L-shaped metal assembly with an ECC83 valve, plus

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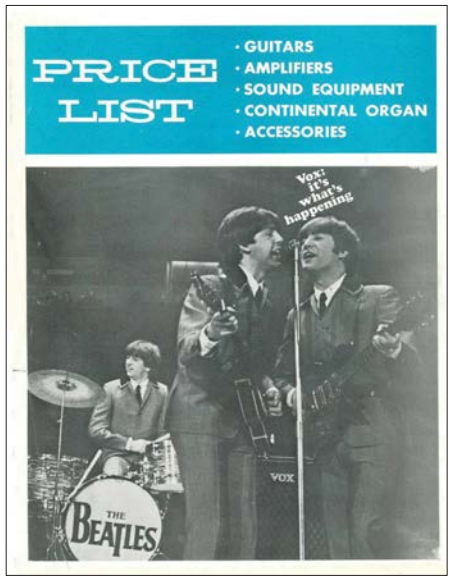

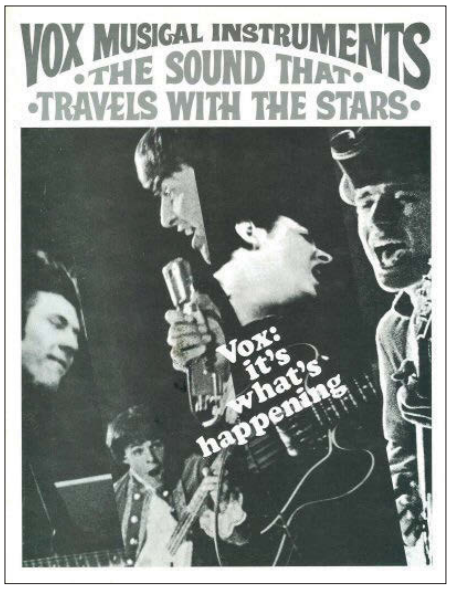

THAT COUNTLESS GUITARISTS HAVE COME TO APPRECIATE DICK'S AMPLIFIERS IS TESTAMENT TO HIS SKILL AND JUDGEMENT

treble and bass controls. In addition to wider tone variation and extra treble, this 'Top Boost' module made up the missing gain.

Although it has been said that Dick was emulating late 50s Fender tweeds, the Top Boost is actually an exact copy of the Gibson GA70 tonestack – complete with the directly grounded bass pot that many consider to be a design error.

The AC30/6 could also be ordered with the module pre-installed and it's this AC30 that can be heard on the early Beatles records. Many regard the AC30/6 Top Boost as the ultimate version, but of late, opinion has begun shifting back towards non-top boost AC30s.

TESTING THE WATERS

Although best known for amp and effect electronics, Dick then turned his hand to one of Vox's most unusual and innovative products – the Guitar Organ. It was his idea to combine the mechanical parts from a Phantom guitar with the oscillators from a Vox Continental. A three-way selector provided regular electric guitar sounds, organ sounds that were triggered merely by holding down the strings and a combination of both.

The neck contained multiple wires connected to the frets and it could be used with a special electronic pick to play arpeggios. It could even generate rhythms, but the instrument was extremely heavy, quite expensive and, due to early manufacturing issues, acquired a reputation for unreliability.

Despite Vox's reputation for crystalline clean sounds, Dick can also lay claim to being one of the pioneers of something altogether more dirty: fuzz. He claimed to have designed an early fuzz circuit with two Mullard OC77 germanium transistors, something that's later substantiated by Paul James of Vox's advertising department, who remembers the prototype being built into an OXO cube tin. Dick was convinced fuzz would sell, but the ever-sceptical Tom Jennings hated the sound, and vetoed the project.

Vox would get into the fuzz game of course, with its Italian-made take on the legendary Tone Bender – some have even suggested it was Dick's work. Dick himself claimed to have given the Beatles a prototype Vox Tone Bender in 1965 that was used on *Rubber Soul*. Vox announced the 816 Distortion Booster in 1965 and launched it in 1966. For a time, Brian May had one built into his guitar and Dick would go on to design a fuzz pedal for Colorsound.

Dick also designed the Vox Echo-Machine and a wireless microphone, but through the mid 1960s there were many changes at Vox.

VOX POPULI

When Tom Jennings resigned from the company in September 1967, Dick followed soon after. He continued working for various clients but it's fair to say that Dick's most important work had already been completed by 1965.

Dick's granddaughter Emily Turner recalls how "he toured the world demonstrating Vox equipment', sometimes on American TV. He also set up equipment for The Beatles and The Rolling Stones at important shows. Apparently, Dick "was fond of The Beatles and enjoyed banter with John Lennon who called him 'nanny goat' because of his beard".

Fans once mistook him for a Beatle and tore some of his clothes. They clearly didn't notice the cosy cardigan Dick habitually wore, or his trad-jazz goatee. He also came to The Beatles' rescue at a Scarborough gig when some amps on trolley stands started trundling down the sloping stage towards them. Thereafter, they were fitted with braking casters.

The Facebook page set up in his honour reveals that "Dick was warm, funny and passionate about music". In later years, he set up an eight-track studio in his dining room where he recorded all his grandchildren singing along to *Blue Moon*.

Apparently, Dick's house was chock full of electronic components and circuit boards and his garage was packed with "bits that might come in useful". He called everybody 'Cuz' and enjoyed Blue Nun or a good port topped off with a cigar.

Although he never became rich, Dick felt content that he had made a living being paid for what was essentially his hobby and that's possibly the nub of it. He combined a working knowledge of electronics with a musician's sensibility and great ears to achieve the sounds he liked using the technology and components of the time.

That countless guitarists have appreciated Dick's amplifiers is testament to his skill and judgement. The same cannot be said for many highly trained electronics engineers working in the same field. Dick died a few months after his 80th birthday on 6 June 2001, leaving a son, five daughters and the most wonderful sonic legacy.

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CHORDS IN MOTION

Standard tuning is versatile but it can make it tricky to move chord shapes around. Rod Fogg goes in search of symmetry...

To build a chord we start on the root note and then add the third and the fifth above. Sometimes, to make a four-note chord we add the octave or maybe the seventh. The first chord in figure 1 shows a common major chord shape, which goes root, third, fifth, octave from low to high on the top four strings. The next chord hops those four notes over to the middle four strings, producing a chord that is a little tricky to hold down considering it's just a four-string major shape. Both chords have the same voicing, but looking at your fretting hand there seems very little in common between them. Finally, we take this voicing to the lowest four strings and find that the shape has changed again.

This illustrates that the guitar is not a symmetrical instrument. This is because guitar strings are tuned in fourths (four letter names apart) with the exception of the G and B strings, which are only a third apart. This means that when we move a chord from one group of strings to another, the shape has to change. Put simply: if you are moving a chord shape from higher strings to lower strings (as in figure 1) the note that was on the B string will need to be one fret lower – that means one fret nearer the nut. If you're going from low strings to high strings (figure 1 played in reverse) the note that arrives on the B string will need to be one fret higher – that means one fret nearer the bridge.

Figure 2 takes a look at the same problem but this time using minor chords. The simple minor shape on the top four strings becomes awkward when it comes to the middle four strings, although that chunky sounding lower-string voicing is not so bad. The notes of all the chords we have looked at so far are piled up in order – keyboard players tend to default to voicing chords in this way, whereas guitar players often reorder the notes so they fit under the fingers a little better. Allow figure 3 to demonstrate...

In figure 3 the chords go root, fifth, octave, third from low to high. The third has been taken from its place between the root and fifth and repositioned as the highest note of the

Figure 1

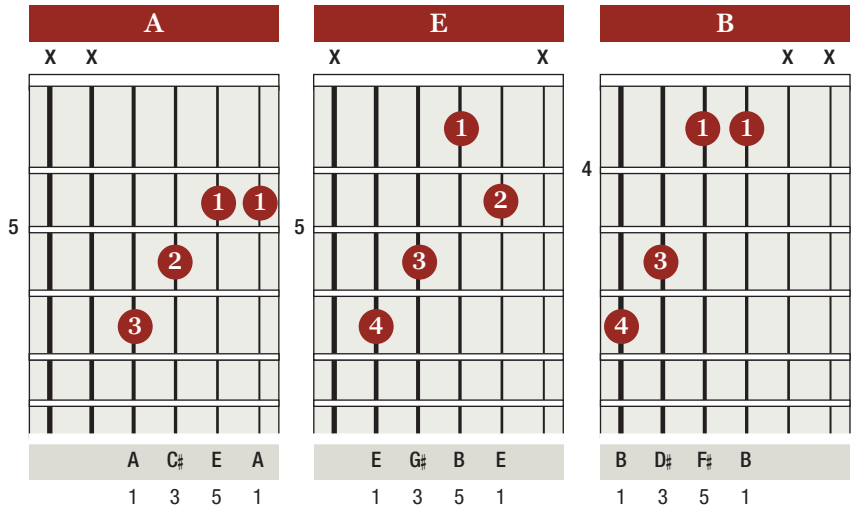
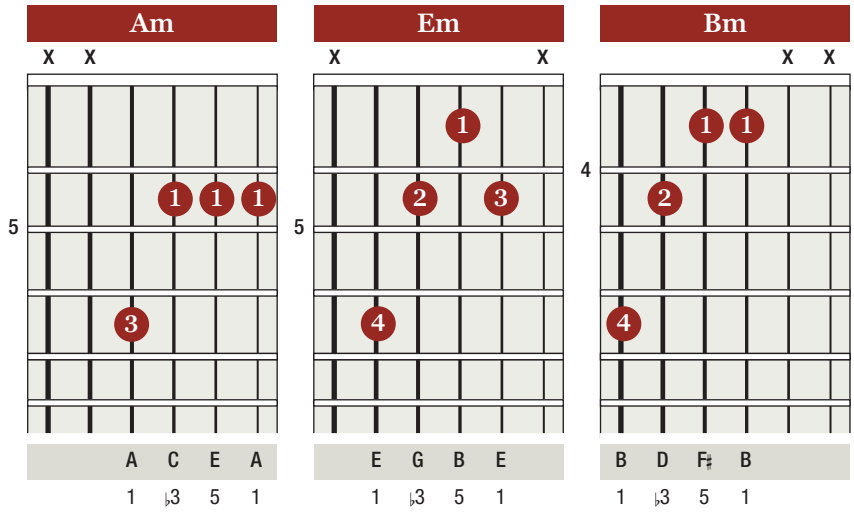


Figure 2



chord. The first and second diagrams are really useful shapes and pop up all over rock guitar; the third shape, with the big stretch between fingers one and two, is a bit less friendly. Incidentally, if you struggle to get the third finger flat on the second chord, just use fingers two, three and four on their tips instead. You might recognise these three shapes as being based on the open chords E, A and D. Figure 4 covers the same ground, but using minor chords. There is less for you to struggle with in this example.

Pushing the boundaries a little, figure 5 (over the page) goes back to piling up the notes of the chord in order, and adds the major seventh instead of the octave. We are starting the first shape on the top four strings for reasons which will become clear. Initially, we get the cool, dreamy sounding major seventh chord which fits well under all four fingers. Jumped across a string, it still fits under the fingers well and even makes a good two-chord groove. The problems start when we try to take it over one more string to the bottom four strings. It is possible, but it's a stretch and our cool groove suddenly disappears as we struggle to get the fingers down in time.

Let's try reordering the notes as we did for figure 3. Figure 6 has three major seventh chord shapes, which read root, fifth, major seventh and third from low to high, and all fit comfortably under the fingers. The only change from figure 3 is that the note that was the octave has been lowered by one fret to become the major seventh. On to figure 7, and we find three more seventh chords, this time of the "dominant seventh" variety, again with the notes reordered. Your challenge for this month is to see if you can change these three chords into minor seventh chords. Hint: all three chords will need refingering, but you just need to lower the major third one fret to make it a minor third. Enjoy working those fingers and see you next month!

Figure 3

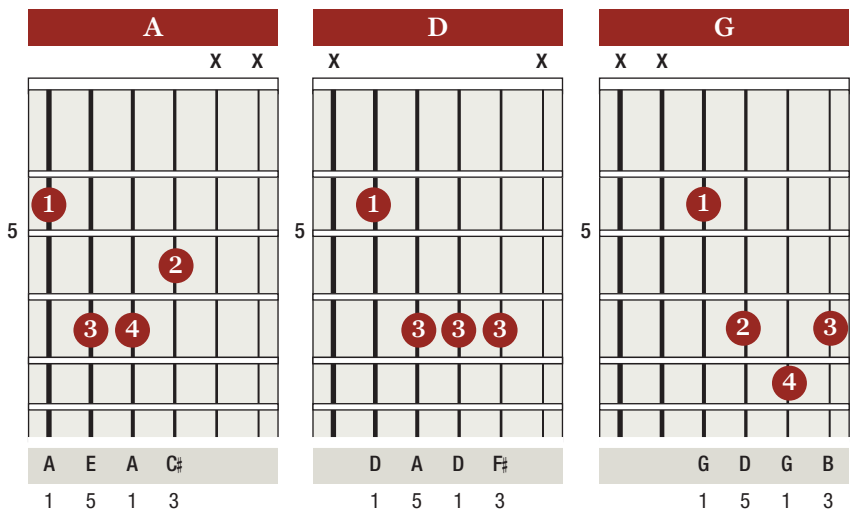
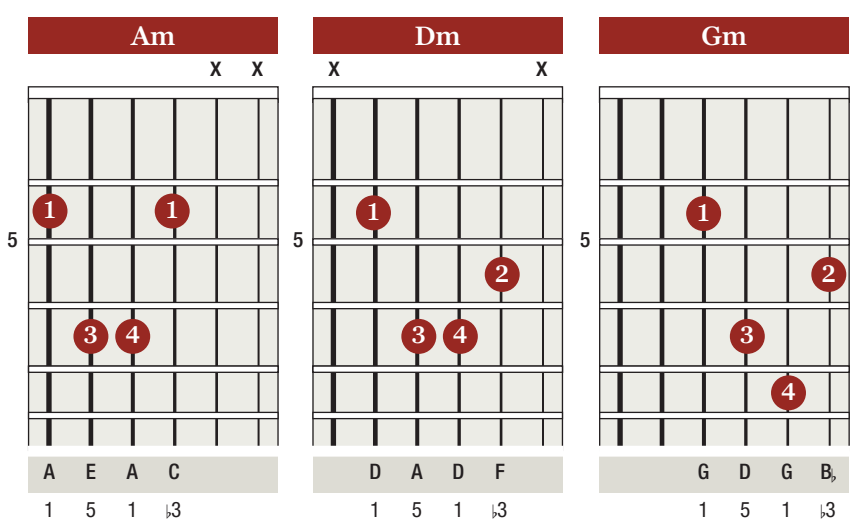
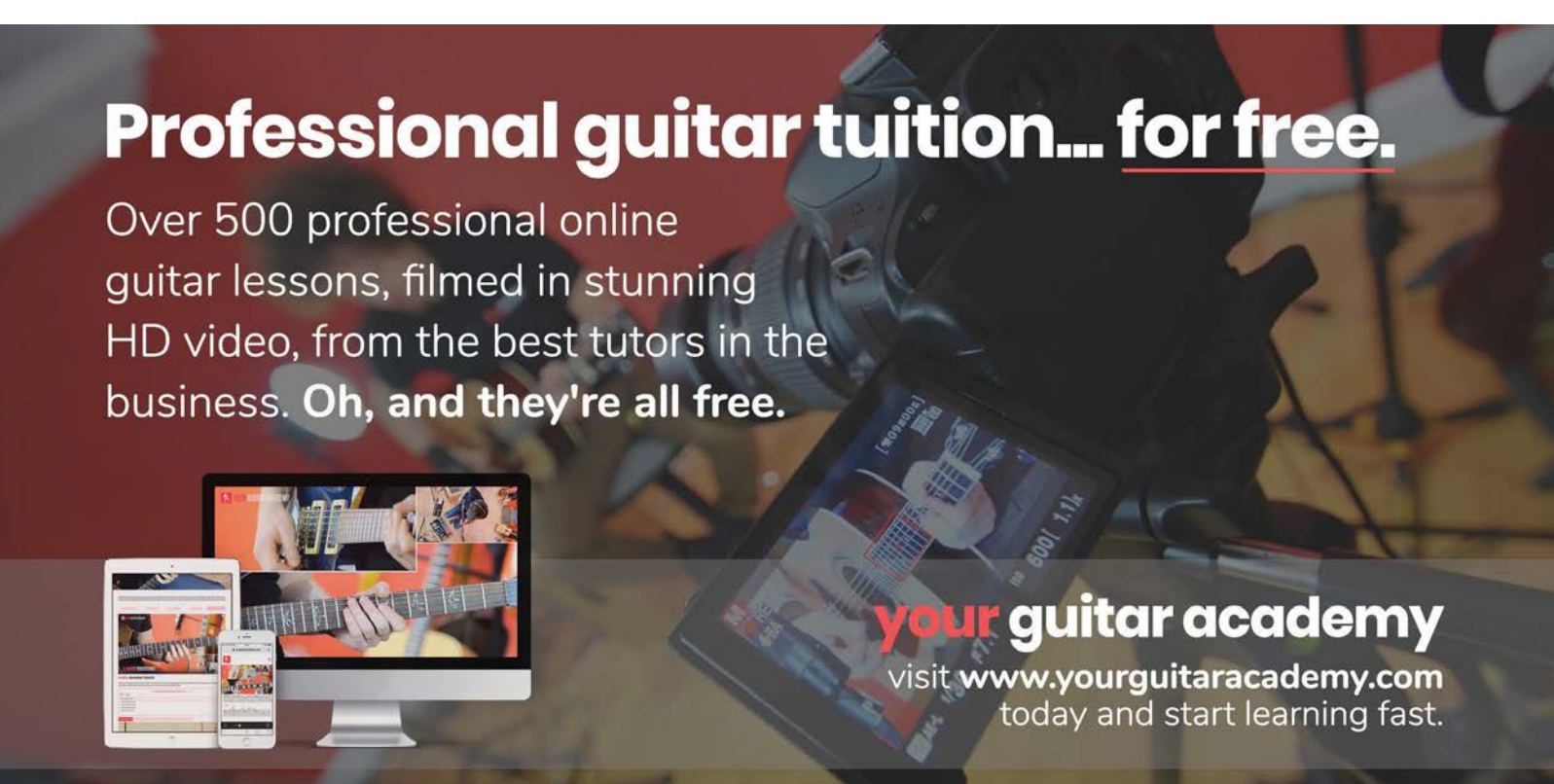


Figure 4





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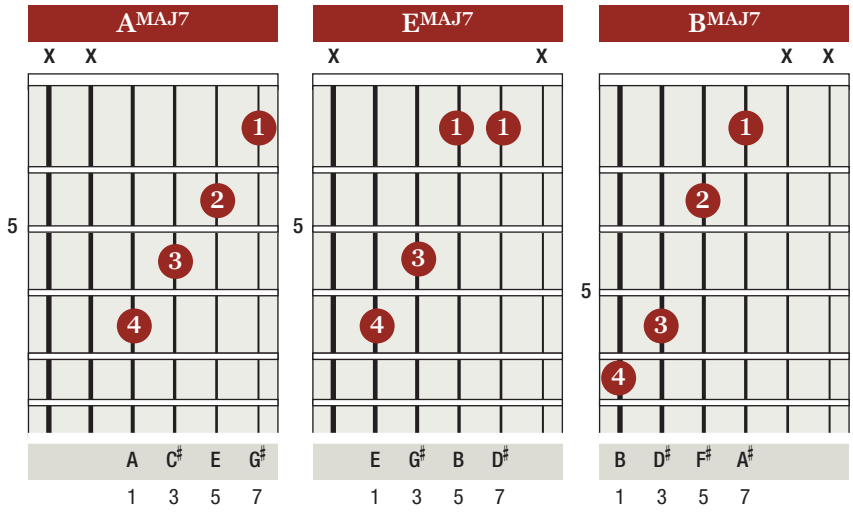


Figure 6

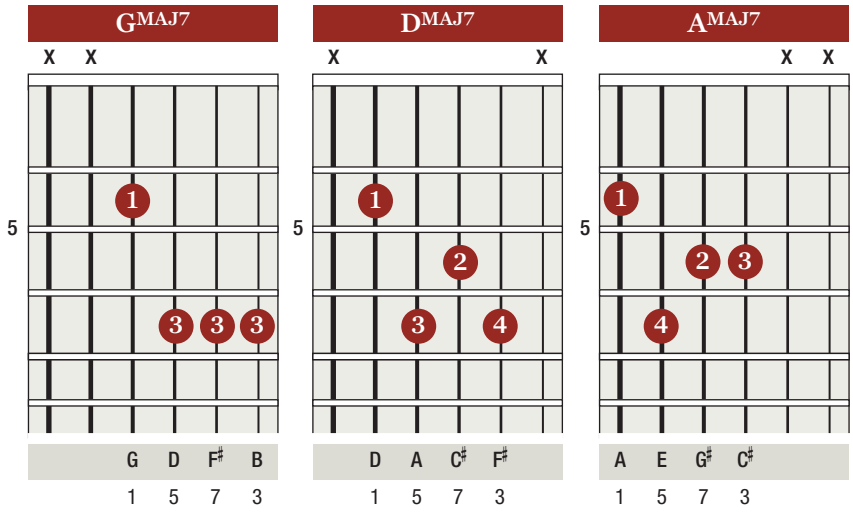
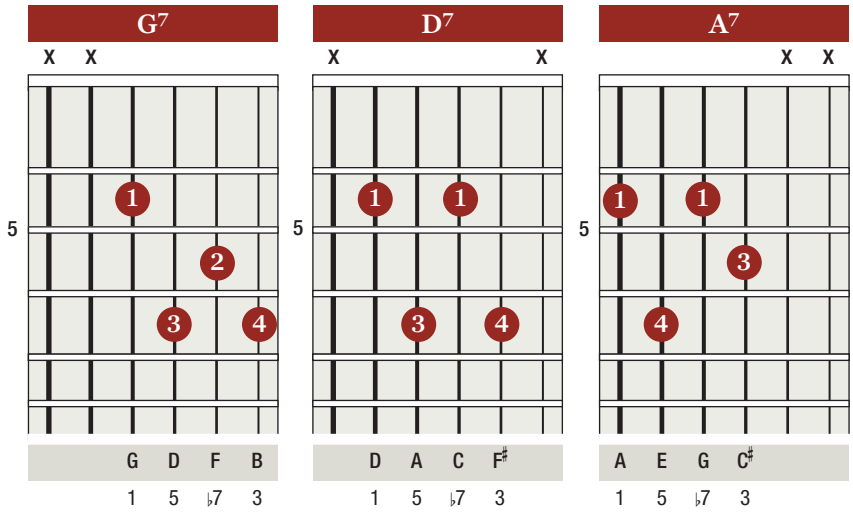


Figure 7



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DAVE KNUDSON

The soon-to-be-former Minus The Bear guitarist on exploding drummers, learning Adele songs and the importance of H2O...

1 I couldn't live without my…
"A couple of years ago it would have been my PRS [McCarty] Goldtop, but now I'm more partial to my Custom 24 – which I used on probably 90 per cent of out last album [2017's Voids] – just because it sounds great, and it's got multiple different sounds. You've got the coil tap on the bridge, even though most of the time I'm on the neck position! But just having 24 frets... you get those extra two notes to just scream at the top!" [laughs]

2 In another life I'd have been…
"I'd probably still be doing graphic design – that's what I was doing before I was in the band, and that's what I went to school for, and I still do some of it now [Dave has designed several MTB album covers, t-shirts and the like – Ed]. Maybe that would have transitioned into something else... who knows!"

3 The moment it all started…
"The first time I heard that Dire Straits song, *Money For Nothing* when I was a kid, blasting in my dad's car. I was like, 'This is awesome!' I don't know if that's the moment that I wanted to be a musician, but that's one of the first times I realised how cool guitar could be, and how being an artist of could be a really fun, powerful and exciting thing to do."

4 The one that got away…
"I've had multiple Les Pauls stolen from me! So I would really like to get those back! It was stupid really – I left them in the trunk of my car one night, then came back and boom, I'm down two Les Pauls! One was a Standard Les Paul, but the other was a 24-fret double-cut... it was one of my favourites."

5 My Spinal Tap moment…
"Well, our drummers keep exploding... [laughs] But I do remember one show we played a few years ago, I think it was in Houston or something, where something was patched incorrectly, and we were playing a couple of songs to a click. So we started the show off... but the click was coming through the keyboard channel instead, so it was like, 'CLICK, CLICK, CLICK' coming straight through the front-of-house... that was fairly embarrassing!"

6 The best advice that I've ever been given…
"Play live. Because it's such a different experience. You can rehearse all you want but there's nothing that can prepare you for having to deal with a sound engineer, or all the problems that come up that you then have to troubleshoot... But also, I'd say the people who encouraged me to just learn a bunch of different kinds of songs, or woodshed to a tab book. Because then you learn all these different techniques that you can then adopt and make into your own voice."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar…
"It depends on the guitar. If it's a Tele or something then I just want to play big ol' regular chords, but if it's like a metal guitar then I'm going to start playing a Metallica song! I think it's totally dependent on the instrument."

8 The most important thing on my rider…
"It's probably actually bottled water. Because when you're on a tour bus, you can't use the water there for anything other than flushing the toilet! So if you want to brush your teeth – where's my bottle of water? When you wake up in the morning and you need a drink – where's my bottle of water? That's so boring, what a horrible answer! I might as well have said 'tube socks!' Actually, chewing gum is really important, too... so water and gum!"

9 My guilty pleasure…
"I still love a lot of bad pop songs, Katy Perry songs, stuff like that. There was a time where I was just at home working out all these Adele songs on guitar... they were interesting to learn, but I feel bad saying that in a guitar magazine interview!" [laughs]

10 If I could just play one thing…
"I'm really not a good soloist, so a lot of the old-school metal solos that I used to hear and would try to replicate, but I couldn't totally fulfil. It would be great to play a Joe Satriani song all the way through, like *Surfing With The Alien* or *Flying In A Blue Dream* – something like that!"

Minus The Bear's farewell EP, *Fair Enough* is out now on Suicide Squeeze

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